



AVOWALS
and
DENIALS

◆
G. K. CHESTERTON

824 C52av

Keep Your Card in This Pocket

Books will be issued only on presentation of proper library cards.

Unless labeled otherwise, books may be retained for four weeks. Borrowers finding books marked, defaced or mutilated are expected to report same at library desk; otherwise the last borrower will be held responsible for all imperfections discovered.

The card holder is responsible for all books drawn on this card.

Penalty for over-due books 2c a day plus cost of notices.

Lost cards and change of residence must be reported promptly.



Public Library
Kansas City, Mo.

Keep Your Card in This Pocket



3 1148 00906 8917

DATE DUE

14 JUN	11 JUN '38	
11 JUL	28 FEB '39	63
8 AUG 45	4 AUG '39	62
8 NOV 27	26 DEC '39	40
30 NOV	14 MAR '40	
4 DEC 40	7 APR '40	61
25 JAN	1 JAN 27 '41	6
17 APR 18	AUG 13 '41	63
21 MAY	1 JAN 31 '42	44
30 JUN 41	15 JUL '42	38
3 AUG 41	DEC 1 '43	43
31 AUG	AUG 18 '50	
29 SEK	14 SEP 18 '53	
13 JAN 41		
6 MARCH	87	
16 MAR 40		
7 MAR		
17 MAR '38		
30 MAR '37		

AVOWALS AND DENIALS

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

CHARLES DICKENS

THE BALLAD OF THE WHITE HORSE

COLLECTED POEMS

TREMENDOUS TRIFLES

ALARMS AND DISCURSIONS

A MISCELLANY OF MEN

THE USES OF DIVERSITY

FANCIES VERSUS FADS

GENERALLY SPEAKING

THE OUTLINE OF SANITY

ALL IS GRIST

COME TO THINK OF IT . . .

ALL I SURVEY

AVOWALS *and* DENIALS

A BOOK OF ESSAYS

By

G. K. CHESTERTON



DODD, MEAD & COMPANY

NEW YORK

1935

COPYRIGHT, 1935
BY DODD, MEAD AND COMPANY, INC.

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED
NO PART OF THIS BOOK MAY BE REPRODUCED IN ANY FORM
WITHOUT PERMISSION IN WRITING FROM THE PUBLISHER

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
BY THE VAIL-BALLOU PRESS, INC., BINGHAMTON, N. Y.



Note

THE essays of which this book is composed are reprinted, often with slight alterations, from the *Illustrated London News*, by kind permission of the proprietors of that paper.

Contents

	PAGE
I ON MONSTERS AND LOGIC	I
II ON CHRISTMAS THAT IS COMING	8
III ON THE MAN ON THE SPOT	15
IV ON SHAW AND HIS BLACK GIRL	22
V ON THE ATHEIST MUSEUM	28
VI ON THE NEW PRUDERY	34
VII ON THE RETURN OF THE BARBARIAN	41
VIII ON WOMEN WHO VOTE	47
IX ON THE FALLACY OF EUGENICS	53
X ON THE CLASSICISM OF THE TERROR	60
XI ON THE RETURN TO THE LAND	67
XII ON DIALECT AND DECENCY	74
XIII ON MAN: HEIR OF ALL THE AGES	81
XIV ON THE REAL ANIMAL	87
XV ON DOGS WITH BAD NAMES	94
XVI ON THE PRISON OF JAZZ	100
XVII ON THE DECEPTIBILITY OF YOUTH	107
XVIII ON THE DUKE OF MARLBOROUGH	114
XIX ON THE CRANK AND THE CAD	121
XX ON DREAMS	127
XXI ON THE FOSSIL OF A FANATIC	133

CONTENTS

	PAGE
XXII ON BLAKE AND HIS CRITICS	139
XXIII ON THE INSTABILITY OF THE STATE	146
XXIV ON A MELODRAMA	152
XXV ON THE ONE-PARTY SYSTEM	158
XXVI ON BOOKS FOR PESSIMISTS	165
XXVII ON THE SCIENCE OF SOCIOLOGY	171
XXVIII ON THE LETTER-BAG NOVEL	178
XXIX ON THE TOUCHY REALIST	184
XXX ON WORDSWORTH	191
XXXI ON FACING FACTS	198
XXXII ON FREE VERSE	205
XXXIII ON ERIC GILL	211
XXXIV ON PRUSSIAN PAGANISM	217
XXXV ON THE GREAT RELAPSE	224
XXXVI ON THE NEXT HUNDRED YEARS	231



AVOWALS AND DENIALS



I

On Monsters and Logic

AT the time of writing, the Press is boiling and bubbling with the emergence and appearance, or the submersion and disappearance, of the Monster who is supposed to live, for reasons best known to himself, at the bottom of Loch Ness. I need not say that such a Monster, whether or no he is an inhabitant of Loch Ness, is a very popular inhabitant of Fleet Street. He is doubtless a benevolent Monster; and has helped many poor journalists to place paragraphs here and there. In the grand imagery of the Book of Job, he maketh the deep to boil like a pot; and has also been the occasion of a good deal of pot-boiling. But all this is a casual and even happy accident, and does not affect the question itself one way or the other. Nor indeed am I myself primarily concerned to settle the question itself one way or the other. What interests me is the argument as an argument; which has followed almost exactly in the ancient serpentine track of the Great Sea-serpent. I am not especially excited about these alleged animals; and I do not understand why anybody should be so curiously excited about them. I do not know, or care, whether there is a monster in the

ON MONSTERS AND LOGIC

loch, or a sea-serpent in the sea. But I am very much interested in another monster; a much more monstrous monster; one so fantastic that he might well be a fabulous monster. This monster is called Man; and instead of the humps and horns and writhing tails, with which such creatures are credited, he has an abnormal excrescence called a Head. In this, it has been conjectured, there resides some mysterious principle called a Mind; but really, it has lately become almost as elusive and evasive as the Monster of Loch Ness.

For the way in which most critics, especially sceptical critics, write about a thing like the lake-monster is very like the way in which they wrote about the sea-serpent. That is, it is both mysterious and mystical and irrational. First of all, there is a vague assumption, the very reverse of the truth, which is made silently at the start, and thus confuses the whole controversy; the vague assumption that the subject is in some way a semi-mystical subject. One article, by a very able journalist, actually opened with some such phrase as, "In dealing with these stories of ghosts or monsters." I cannot for the life of me see that a sea-serpent is any more mystical than a sea-snail. In one sense they are all mystical, since the mystery of the Creator is in all His works; but that sort of mystery attaches quite as much to the smallest shrimp eaten by a tripper at Margate. But the largest snake in the sea

ON MONSTERS AND LOGIC

is no more supernatural than the smallest snake in the sea. How large such creatures can be in the depths of the sea may be a matter of scientific discussion; but it ought to be a matter of purely scientific discussion. There is nothing particularly transcendental about holding that there are bigger fish in the sea than ever came out of it. Nor is there any touch of the Celtic Twilight, or any glamour of Gaelic witchery and vision, about the proposition that a very large live animal, if there be any such large live animal, might be in the bottom of a Scotch loch as much as anywhere else. Whether there is or not is simply a question of human evidence; and even the waverers admit that the evidence for it is pretty strong.

Now it is here I note that queer quality in the Mind, since it has become what is called the Modern Mind. I do not say it with a sneer; for in this case it covers some modern minds that really are minds, and, on their own line, some of our best minds. The truth I think is this: that since the triumph of what was called rationalism, we have successfully cultivated everything *except* reason. Many modern minds, not only eminent but normal modern minds, have been trained to a quite exquisite appreciation of art or music or landscape; and can detect and even describe fine shades in these things, that would probably have been missed altogether by

Aristotle or Dr. Johnson. But if it came to argument, to clear and connected argument, either Aristotle or Dr. Johnson would have thought he had got into an infant school. Dr. Johnson would probably have said an idiot school. But I do not say it; having no claim to emulate Dr. Johnson in his talents and virtues, I need not needlessly emulate him in his faults and exaggerations. The men with this mental disproportion are not fools; many of them are brilliant and subtle writers, along literary lines where I could never hope to follow them. But they seem somehow to have forgotten how to set about forming a reasonable conclusion about anything. They are masters in the art of appreciating, describing, and analysing impressions; but they do not seem to know how to make any deductions. As an Impressionist artist could paint a perfect impression of Loch Ness, so this Impressionist critic could record a perfect impression of the Monster of Loch Ness. But when he is asked to test the impression in relation to truth, he does not seem to know the technique of such a test. For instance, there is no finer or more penetrating literary critic than Mr. Robert Lynd, especially when the literary critic is really criticizing literature. Set Mr. Robert Lynd to write about Mr. W. B. Yeats, and he will estimate the style and stature of that great poet about as well as it could be done, and

ON MONSTERS AND LOGIC

certainly much better than I could do it. But set him to inquire whether Mr. Yeats's stories of eastern wizards or Irish fairies are *true*, and I respectfully doubt whether he would be half so scientific as I should.

He wrote an article on the Monster of Loch Ness, in a recent issue of the *Daily News*, which exactly illustrates the elusive thing I mean. It was a very good article; but it was full of hesitations and (if I may use the jargon) of inhibitions. He said first, with obvious common sense, that it is very difficult to contradict the evidence of a score of apparently normal and respectable and independent witnesses. The same might be said of the Great Sea-serpent; the number of people who could swear to having seen it must by this time amount to pretty nearly a hundred. So far so good. It is for the other side to rebut this evidence definitely and in detail; to cross-examine these witnesses; to prove a rather improbable conspiracy, or to construct some theory to explain that number of people having been deceived. But the critic, feeling that in fairness he must pass on to state the other side, states it in a way which is supremely typical of modern irrationalism. He says, in these words or words to the same effect: "But if I agree to believe in the Monster of Loch Ness, where am I to draw the line? There are such a lot of other stories about other monsters"—and he proceeds to pour forth

ON MONSTERS AND LOGIC

the riches of his wide reading, introducing us to the most fascinating and agreeable monsters of Celtic or Norse mythology; and seems gloomily resigned to go through with it and swallow all the monsters one after another, back to the whale that swallowed Jonah or the dragon that was to devour Andromeda. Anyone addicted to the antiquated mystery of Logic, so much studied by the superstitious Schoolmen of the Middle Ages, will be rather disposed to stare at this statement of the difficulty. He will naturally answer: "Well, I suppose you will draw the line where the evidence fails. You accept this Monster because there are twenty people to give evidence. You will naturally believe less where there is less evidence; and not at all where there is no evidence. There is really no need for you to draw abstract *a priori* distinctions between a Seven-headed Dragon in Persia and a Nine-headed Dragon in Japan." The truth is that the critic is misled from the first by that vague idea that, in accepting any such story, he is stepping across the border of fairyland, where any fantastic thing may happen. This is a fallacy even about preternatural things. A man may believe one miracle and not another miracle; knowing there are true and false miracles, as there are true and false banknotes. But the Monster is not a miracle. Something like it may

ON MONSTERS AND LOGIC

occur along with magic in magic tales. But a man might as well say that millers and cats and princesses are fabulous animals, because they appear side by side with goblins and mermaids in the stories of the nursery.

THESE lines first appeared some time in Christmas week; thereby violating all the fundamental principles of modern civilization, defying the normal and necessary laws of Christmas Trade, Christmas Sales, Christmas Numbers, Christmas Shopping, and even a great deal of Christmas greeting; in a word, committing the crime of talking about Christmas quite near to Christmas Day. For the curious custom of our time has turned Christmas into a vast anticipation; by turning it into a vast advertisement. Most journalists have to write their Christmas articles somewhere about the last days of their summer holiday; and prepare to launch them at the earliest about the middle of the autumn. They have to stuff their imaginations with holly and mistletoe while gazing at the last rose of summer; or call up a vision of falling snowflakes in a forest of falling leaves. It is a rather peculiar feature of modern times; and is connected with other things that are typically modern. It is perhaps mixed up with that spirit of Prophecy, which has made the modern Utopias; and has even led some men to call themselves Futurists, on the quaint

ON CHRISTMAS THAT IS COMING

supposition that it is possible to be really fond of the future. It is connected with that optimism once romantically expressed in the phrase "a good time coming"; which its simpler supporters might perhaps convey in the formula of "now we shan't be long"; which its more sardonic critics might perhaps express in the formula, "jam tomorrow; but never jam today." At least, in the matter of the serious prediction of social perfection, it is hardly unfair to say that many would still agree that there is a good time coming; but would find it difficult to agree that now, at this particular moment, we shan't be long. They would still say that Utopia is coming, as some men say that Christmas is coming; especially when they say it (with a shade of bitterness) about the month of March or April. But, under all the official publicity, it is comparatively rare to say that Christmas is coming, at the very moment when it really is coming. It is perhaps even rarer to say, with a solid and complete satisfaction, that Christmas has come.

For the Futurist fashion of our time has led nearly everybody to look for happiness tomorrow rather than today. Thus, while there is an incessant and perhaps even increasing fuss about the approach of the festivities of Christmas, there is rather less fuss than there ought to be about really making Christmas festive. Modern

ON CHRISTMAS THAT IS COMING

men have a vague feeling that when they have come to the feast, they have come to the finish. By modern commercial customs, the preparations for it have been so very long and the practice of it seems so very short. This is, of course, in sharp contrast to the older traditional customs, in the days when it was a sacred festival for a simpler people. Then the preparation took the form of the more austere season of Advent and the fast of Christmas Eve. But when men passed on to the feast of Christmas, it went on for a long time after the feast of Christmas Day. It always went on for a continuous holiday of rejoicing for at least twelve days; and only ended in that wild culmination which Shakespeare described as *Twelfth Night* or *What You Will*. That is to say, it was a sort of *Saturnalia* which ended in anybody doing whatever he would; and in William Shakespeare writing some very beautiful and rather irrelevant poetry, round a perfectly impossible story about a brother and sister who looked exactly alike. In our more enlightened times, the perfectly impossible stories are printed in magazines a month or two before Christmas has begun at all; and in the hustle and hurry of this early publication, the beautiful poetry is somehow or other left out.

It were vain to conceal my own reactionary prejudice; which deludes me into thinking there is something to

ON CHRISTMAS THAT IS COMING

be said for the older manner. I am so daring as darkly to suspect that it would be better if people could enjoy Christmas when it came, instead of being bored with the news that it was coming. I even think it might be better to be the naughty little boy who falls sick through eating too much Christmas pudding, than to be the more negative and nihilistic little boy, who is sick of seeing pictures of Christmas pudding, in popular periodicals or coloured hoardings, for months before he gets any pudding at all.

At any rate, the proof of the Christmas pudding is in the eating. And it stands as a symbol of a whole series of things; which too many people nowadays have forgotten how to enjoy in themselves, and for themselves, and at the time when they are actually consumed. Far too much space is taken up with the names of things rather than the things themselves; with designs and plans and pictorial announcements of certain objects; rather than with the real objects when they are really objective. The world we know is far too full of rumours and reports and reflected reputations; instead of the direct appreciation by appetite and actual experience. The difficulty always presented to those who would restore men to a simpler life on the land, for instance, is always some form of the objection (true or false) that modern men would be dull if they dealt

ON CHRISTMAS THAT IS COMING

with real land on a farm, instead of unreal landscape in a film. As a fact, the farm landscape has a hundred interesting things in it which the film landscape has not. But the critics cannot bring themselves to believe that a man will ever again have a taste for going back to the originals, as more interesting than the copies. For all the apparent materialism and mass mechanism of our present culture, we far more than any of our fathers live in a world of shadows. It is none the less so because the prophets and progressives tell us eagerly that these are coming events which cast their shadow before. It is assumed that nothing is really thrilling except a dance of shadows; and we miss the very meaning of substance.

There is another way in which the Christmas pudding, though substantial enough, is itself an allegory and a sign. The little boy expects to find sixpences in the pudding; and this is right enough, so long as the sixpences are secondary to the pudding. Now the change from the medieval to the modern world might be very truly described under that image. It is all the difference between putting sixpences in a Christmas pudding and erecting a Christmas pudding round sixpences. There was money in the old days of Christmas and Christendom; there was merchandise; there were merchants. But the moral scheme of all the old order,

whatever its other vices and diseases, always assumed that money was secondary to substance; that the merchant was secondary to the maker. Windfalls of money came to this man and that, as shillings and six-pences are extracted excitedly from Christmas puddings. But the idea of normal owning or enjoying preponderated over the idea of accidental or adventurous gain. With the rise of the merchant adventurers the whole world gradually changed, until the preponderance was all the other way. The world was dominated by what the late Lord Birkenhead described as "the glittering prizes," without which, as he appeared to believe, men could not be really moved to any healthy or humane activity. And it is true that men came to think too much about prizes, and too little about pudding. This, in connexion with ordinary pudding, is a fallacy; in connexion with Christmas pudding it is a blasphemy. For there is truly something of perversity, not unmixed with profanity, about the notion of trade completely transforming a tradition of such sacred origin. Millions of perfectly healthy and worthy men and women still keep Christmas, and do in all sincerity keep it holy as well as happy. But there are some, profiting by such natural schemes of play and pleasure-seeking, who have used it for things far baser than either pleasure-seeking or play. They have betrayed Christmas. For them the

ON CHRISTMAS THAT IS COMING

substance of Christmas, like the substance of Christmas pudding, has become stale stuff in which their own treasure is buried; and they have only multiplied the sixpences into thirty pieces of silver.

*III**On the Man on the Spot*

I HAVE always mistrusted the Man On the Spot; because I fancy he is the Man In the Spotlight. It is rather like the feeling about the tourist who sends a picture postcard purchased on the spot; we have a suspicion that the spot is only too well known as a beauty spot. Particular persons and particular places are picked out by the limelight of publicity, in a way that is not really representative. In fact, I have always had a feeling, myself, that the luckiest of all journeys would be to set out for some famous place, and lose your way and find yourself in another place. It would probably have all the beauties and virtues of the first place; and the virtues would not be vulgarized. You should have the huge good fortune of finding the old, original famous place, before it was famous.

It is still more true of the sort of country that is filled with a sort of controversy; where there are rival shrines or centres of learning; or competing couriers and agents of culture. In other words, the man on the spot is even more mystifying or misleading, in a country which is (so to speak) liable to come out in spots.

ON THE MAN ON THE SPOT

This sort of rash or eruption of local interest is likely to follow on any public debate about politics or religion; or anything that really matters; but it is proportionately difficult to judge the real proportions. A man who would interest us, say, in the cult of Nudism, will tell us that it is essentially Nordic; though why people should want to wear fewer clothes because they live in colder countries, I cannot imagine. He will tell you, as I learned from a book I read recently, that Sweden, or some such Scandinavian country, is the primitive and holy home of Nudism. But there must be a good many people on the spot in Sweden who would strongly object to coming out in spots in this way. In this case, as I have said, it is not a question of the spot, but of the spotlight. Cranks of this kind are advertised; they are especially advertised by themselves. This sort of man on the spot is simply a nuisance; and, though it may be well believed that I do not exactly worship Herr Hitler, and that I am not disposed at the moment to enrol myself among the Nazis any more than among the Nudists—yet I cannot blame Herr Hitler for extinguishing the light of this particular spotlight-man; and I could understand his temptation if (in the American variant of the phrase) he really put him on the spot.

In any case, our judgment of remote problems, involving other races or religions, is rather hampered than

ON THE MAN ON THE SPOT

helped by the local limelight; which picks out this or that figure for a representative of the real state of things. It might almost be better to deduce the probabilities from general principles of human nature than to accept absolutely as infallible the private experiences of human beings. Indeed, I have myself come to the conclusion, on this as on many other matters, that the method most often needed is the very reverse of the modern method of what is called experiment or experience. Social experiment differs from chemical experiment, or anything that is really practical in the way of scientific experiment. It differs in this vital respect: that the students of the social science dispute, not only about what will happen, but about what did happen. Two chemists are not left quarrelling about whether there was or was not an explosion with a loud bang. If there was, both will agree that for some reason a state of unstable equilibrium did exist; and that it did happily stabilize itself and return to equilibrium with a loud bang. But two sociologists will continue to argue whether there was really an unstable social equilibrium; whether the social explosion was large or small, artificial or real, accidental or symptomatic, and whether the bang was really loud enough to be noticed. These differences of opinion exist more on the spot than anywhere else. The specialist on the spot is more of a

ON THE MAN ON THE SPOT

partisan than anybody else. Thus we may be told any day that the brilliant investigator, Dr. Hugg, is a specialist on the Cannibal Islands, or what not; and people will sit at his feet as if he were not only an expert witness, but an impartial judge. But, after all, the real specialist on Cannibalism is the Cannibal. Nobody could be more swiftly and splendidly on the spot than he is, when there is any Cannibalism going forward. The objection to the Cannibal as a judge of Cannibalism is not that he is ignorant of Cannibalism, or remote from Cannibalism, or not on the spot as a specialist in Cannibalism. It is that he is just the least tiny little bit biased; and so is Dr. Hugg.

For this reason I have long tended towards the very unfashionable notion, that what may be called Theory is much more important than most modern people, who pride themselves on being practical people, are inclined to suppose. I have generally found that the practical man was almost always a partisan. But he is a partisan more than usually difficult to pin down to anything, even to his party, because he has never examined the theory of his own actions; and certainly has no notion of the theories of other people. Now I like to know the theories of other people, even if they are theories I dislike belonging to people I dislike. When I know what principle they are supposed to be acting on, I can

ON THE MAN ON THE SPOT

either deduce their activity or convince them of inconsistency. But when a man calls himself practical, because he does something and doesn't know why, then there is no relation between our minds at all. I would rather talk to a man who really understands the theory of Cannibalism than to another man so prodigiously practical that he was himself partially boiled in a pot.

I will take an example about which I am really rather agnostic—or, in plain words, very ignorant. Mr. Gandhi has admittedly been a man who was for a long time very much on the spot; even, as it says in *The Mikado*, “a spot that is always barred.” The enemies of Mr. Gandhi are also on the spot, and revolutionary change might possibly put them on the other side of the bars. But it does not help me to listen to a lady in sandals, who is a Theosophist and a Socialist, who says that she has been for years on the spot with Mr. Gandhi and knows him to be a saint—or, preferably, a Mahatma. Nor does it help me to listen to a choleric Anglo-Indian major, who says that *he* has been for years on the same spot, and that he knows that Gandhi is a mountebank. I think both these excellent persons are quite capable of believing what they want to believe. But if I did try to gratify my own curiosity, they would think it a most deplorably thin and theoretical and unpractical sort of curiosity. What

ON THE MAN ON THE SPOT

I should like to know is, first, what a Mahatma is; second, whether Gandhi really is a Mahatma; third, how you know he is a Mahatma; and, fourth, how all this fits in with the indubitable fact that he is by birth a Hindu; I believe of the third or commercial caste. I really inquire because I am ignorant. I only ask for information, like Socrates and Miss Dartle. Mahatmas used to be invoked by Theosophists; and Theosophists used to be presented as Esoteric Buddhists; and, ignorant as I am, I know that Buddhism is not the same as Brahmanism. If somebody would clear up the theory, even of a little thing like that, it would help me to understand India much better than the mere emotions of practical people about what they like or dislike; the mere spites or affections of the men on the spot. And it is exactly that sort of thing that is never dealt with in the newspapers, and seldom even reported by the traveller. It may be that there is a very simple explanation, but I should like to know it, because I should like to simplify the primary principles of the problem. As it stands, it does not seem to be merely a matter of likes and dislikes, but possibly of loyalties and disloyalties. Ignorant as I am of India, I know there must be any number of things to which Indians feel that they should be loyal, long before or quite apart from the political question of loyalty to the British Empire.

ON THE MAN ON THE SPOT

Now the newspapers have concentrated on that political question, because it is what is called a practical question. But, while remaining in blank ignorance (like Socrates), I rather think there is one thing that may be known about India and all Asia; and that is that it always did, and always will, concentrate largely on theoretical things. To leave out theoretical things is to be too insanely unpractical, even for a practical man.

I NOTICED that in Mr. Bernard Shaw's new parable, about the Black Girl in search of God, he repeats a notion which he and others have often suggested. It is the notion of not only being an uncompleted man, but of worshipping an uncompleted God. This amused me a little, for it struck me at once that the progressive Futurist and Fabian who talks about his divinity as "not being properly made up yet," is, in fact, doing exactly what the Black Girl and all the most abject African savages are accused of doing. The Hebrew Prophets, whom Mr. Shaw almost admires, and the modern missionaries, to whom he is very nearly polite, have both of them always bombarded idolaters and fetish-worshippers with denunciations of the most illogical and grotesque fact about their faith: the fact that they "worship the work of their own hands." The black African savage takes a handful of mud, pokes and pulls it about into a particular shape that is entirely the product of his own fancy, and then, although he knows he has just made the thing himself, manages to fall down and worship it, as if it were the maker of

ON SHAW AND HIS BLACK GIRL

all things. And it seems to me that the evolutionary theists of the type of Mr. Bernard Shaw or Professor Julian Huxley do exactly and precisely the same thing. They manage to make a god themselves; and then somehow manage to adore it as the god that has made them. This seems stupid to my simple mind; as it did to the simple minds of the Hebrew Prophets, of the Moslem law-givers, and the modern missionaries in Africa. It is manufacturing an artificial faith, and then expecting it to be as natural as nature and as supernatural as God. In short, this extraordinary faith-worship is so very like ordinary fetish-worship, from a rational standpoint, that I do not wonder that the Black Girl could pass so rapidly from one to the other. As an old-fashioned person, who still believes that Reason is a gift of God and a guide to truth, I must confine myself to saying that I do not want a God whom I have made, but a God who has made me. But that is not the question, the lighter and lesser question, which I meant to raise in connexion with this matter of a completed humanity. Mr. Shaw's idea is only connected with that by the thin and fantastic thread of his theory of a progress permanently incomplete.

Perhaps we might call the two antagonistic philosophies the philosophy of The Tree and the philosophy of The Cloud. I mean that a tree goes on growing, and

therefore goes on changing; but always in the fringes surrounding something unchangeable. The innermost rings of the tree are still the same as when it was a sapling; they have ceased to be seen, but they have not ceased to be central. When the tree grows a branch at the top, it does not break away from the roots at the bottom; on the contrary, it needs to hold more strongly by its roots the higher it rises with its branches. That is the true image of the vigorous and healthily progress of a man, a city, or a whole species. But when the evolutionists I speak of talk to us about change, they do not mean that. They do not mean something that produces external changes from a permanent and organic centre, like a tree; they mean something that changes completely and entirely in every part, at every minute, like a cloud. There is no core of a cloud; there is no head or tail that cannot turn into something else; it not only changes, but it is itself only a prolonged change. While Hamlet and Polonius stood looking at the cloud, it will be remembered that, in those few minutes, the prince could persuade the courtier that the cloud had a hump like a camel, that it was a weasel, and that it was a whale. That is the cosmos as understood by these cosmic philosophers; the cosmos is a cloud. It changes in every part; nor is one part more permanent or even more essential than the other. For

ON SHAW AND HIS BLACK GIRL

that matter, of course, the cosmic philosophers change as much as their cosmic cloud. When I was a boy, the universe was conceived under the image of the sick camel of Schopenhauer; a cosmos which certainly had the hump. After that, the Will to Live, which had been mournfully accepted by Schopenhauer, was carried forward with much greater briskness and tenacity by practical thinkers such as Mr. H. G. Wells, in some respects not unlike weasels; and now it is once more assuming vaster and darker outlines, more monstrous and more mysterious, as adumbrated in Mr. Shaw and his Hebrew Prophets: very like a whale. For Mr. Shaw really gives me the impression that he is still to some extent brooding on how the whale could have swallowed Jonah, or how anybody can swallow the whale.

Now, if this merely cloudy and boneless development be adopted as a philosophy, then there can be no place for the past and no possibility of a complete culture. Anything may be here today and gone tomorrow; even tomorrow. But I do not accept that everlasting evolution, which merely means everlasting chaos. As I only accept the organic and orderly development of a thing according to its own design and nature, there is for me such a thing as a human culture that is reasonably complete. Only the modern, advanced, progressive

ON SHAW AND HIS BLACK GIRL.

scientific culture is unreasonably incomplete. It is, as Stevenson said, "a dingy ungentlemanly business; it leaves so much out of a man." Now, the things that it leaves out of a man are almost exactly the things that a proper understanding of Christmas, and the old religious festivals of the race, would probably put into a man. There is the right idea of dignity, with its companion, the right idea of buffoonery; there is the real psychological understanding of the motives of mummery and masquerade. There is that spirit, now almost entirely lost, which led our fathers to describe even their revelry and gaiety as the "high solemnities" of the festive occasion. There is the profound meaning that lies in the word "mummery," and its connexion with the notion of being mum. There is the yet more profound significance in the word "mystery," which also is really the Greek for being mum. In short, there is the idea that, even on the festive occasion, naturally full of talking and singing, the most sensational thing is silence. All this is full of the now neglected idea that some things are better for being kept in reserve; that the best of all games of hide-and-seek is that in which something remains hidden; and that the solemn and religious ceremonial of hunt-the-slipper is most impressive when the slipper cannot be found. All these old ideas of silence, of sacrifice, of a secret worth keep-

ON SHAW AND HIS BLACK GIRL

ing, inhered in the old type of festivity that had a religious origin; and the modern fashionable festivity is, in comparison, barren and brassy and shrill because it has an irreligious origin. It is significant that in recent days every sort of public entertainment has been called "a show," with the implication that as much as possible must be shown. Sometimes it is hoped that the show will lead to what is called a show-down, but it seems to me more probable that the whole of this modern notion of a show will end by being shown up. For its weakness is, according to the sacred philosophy of the tree, that it has no roots or its roots are very shallow; it is too recent to be rooted in the subconsciousness or to have anything of the dimension of depth, in the matter of memory and what is called "second nature." There is not enough of the momentum of mankind behind it, and it wavers and grows weary even before our eyes.

It may reveal an incurable and indecent levity or frivolity in my character, but most information about Bolsheviks, and especially by Bolsheviks, makes me laugh. I know that some newspaper proprietors and such national leaders think that it should only make us shudder, and issue periodical summonses to the public, telling us to keep on shuddering. But I do not believe very much in shuddering as a way of fighting; I have never heard of any stupidity that was extinguished by shuddering; and I have heard of several that were extinguished by laughing. Certainly there are aspects of the case that are no laughing matter, as stated by some really responsible writers in their formulation of the case against the Bolsheviks. But at least there is nothing but pure, hilarious, happy laughter for some of the Bolshevik methods of formulating the case *for* the Bolsheviks. Thus, for instance, when I merely hear that some of the Russian atheists have pulled down a church, I am naturally distressed. But when I hear that they have turned it into something called an Anti-God Museum, then for the moment all other

ON THE ATHEIST MUSEUM

moods melt into innocent and unmixed merriment.

So far as I can make out, you fit up an Anti-God Museum by getting hold of fragments and relics of all sorts of religions, or what you guess to be religions, and put them in glass cases with little labels on them. I have heard that the embalmed body of a Saint, let us say, will be on one side, and opposite to it an Eskimo who has been kept in cold storage, for some reason known or unknown. Then there would be an ordinary Egyptian mummy and the bones of a Hindu monk, or what not; and so on. And when the brilliant, piercing, penetrating, intelligence of the New Youth has once discovered that it is possible to put the relic of a Coptic hermit in the same room with a fetish from the South Sea Islands, it will instantly draw the logical deduction that the cosmos is devoid of any design. When that powerful intellect has wrestled for a few hours with the fact that the glass case containing a reliquary is very much like the other glass case containing a ju-ju, it will be fully and finally obvious that there is no God. How any human being could think any other human being could be affected, in deciding any serious question, by such a ridiculous jumble of Jarley's Waxworks I cannot imagine myself; but then I am of the old guard of the democratic idealists, and prefer to believe that all men are equal in the possession

ON THE ATHEIST MUSEUM

of human reason. But, in truth, there is really one sense in which such things can be taken seriously. Indeed, it has a moral against ourselves, which is sometimes more wholesome than a moral against our opponents.

The very worst part of the Bolshevik bosh is that it is by no means confined to Bolsheviks. Indeed, all the worst parts of it the Bolsheviks have borrowed from the sort of economic and biological materialism that had already existed in Western Europe long before they turned it into a wild but belated riot in Eastern Europe. Thus, while the Communists may be called mad in many ways, what they are really mad on is machinery; which is exactly what our own grandfathers and great-grandfathers were mad on, in the time of the Manchester School. It cannot be said of us now that we are mad on it, or even wild about it. It can only be said that we are tame. But Moscow has the same stupid belief in mechanical action and dead matter supporting its extreme Communism which our fathers had supporting their extreme Individualism. And just as their machinery is borrowed machinery, so their materialism is borrowed materialism. It is the old nineteenth-century materialism of the stalest and stuffiest kind; the kind that nearly all scientific men in the West have now abandoned, because it is stale and

ON THE ATHEIST MUSEUM

stuffy. The stuffiness is apparent in all that stupid old notion of discrediting the high religions by comparing them with the low religions. The staleness simply stinks from the open doors of the Anti-God Museum.

Supposing I were to set out to abolish the art of Painting, and thought I could do it by opening a gallery in which good pictures were hung on one side and bad pictures on the other. Suppose I were a Moslem and an Iconoclast, fanatically desirous of destroying all statues and statuary. And suppose I did it by opening a museum in which I stuck up the Venus of Milo opposite a wax lady out of a low-class hairdresser's shop. Suppose I put the Madonna of Michelangelo side by side with a South Sea Island idol, little more than a lump of stone. Would it prove anything against Sculpture? And why should it prove anything against Religion? Would the earnest and cultured young Communist gravely go round my gallery, and deduce that men must be restrained from their too facile habit of carving great Greek sculpture, lest it should lead them to break out at last into making waxwork busts for shop-windows? Would that thoughtful young man infer that there was a serious danger of somebody beginning with something quite small and simple, like Michelangelo's statues, and be thus encouraged to make formless little fetishes for cannibals? Or dare we

ON THE ATHEIST MUSEUM

hope that there would dawn on him the somewhat evident and elementary thought: that most things have a better form and a worse; that you cannot abolish a whole branch of human culture by showing that cultured people sometimes do it better than uncultured people; and that even when the two men are really aiming at the same thing (which is by no means always the case) you cannot prove from the unworthy example that the worthy example is worthless? Yet I am bound to say, as I have already said, that this obvious fallacy was not invented by the poor Bolshies; they only picked it up from the nineteenth-century materialists, along with a lot of other second-hand goods and third-rate theories.

To this we must add a thousand other things, which the antiquated atheist has probably never heard of at all. There are endless complications of real and recent research, which have cut across the old simple lines of the rationalist theory of religious origins. There is the accumulating evidence of savages themselves, that they are not quite so savage as they were painted; the evidence about the deliberate simplification and voluntary convention in their religious art. There is what many old-fashioned people would call the increasing similarity between the highest modern art and the South Sea Island fetish. Then there is the whole department

ON THE ATHEIST MUSEUM

of demon-worship; and the cases in which idols were not beautiful because they were not meant to be beautiful, but deliberately meant to be ugly. There is the increasing comprehension of harshness and severity in certain schools of sculpture. Above all, there is the increasing interest in the higher religions, considered in an intrinsic and intellectual fashion, and not as they were considered by the superficial generation that mistook them for superstitions. All this is the result of real research as recorded in real museums, with real classification and real and responsible labels. And against all this the belated sect would set up what the Americans would call a Dime Museum, about as authoritative as a penny peep-show. I do not wonder that they have preserved the institution of a Censorship; lest the poor rustics, who look into the peep-show to see that there is no God inside, should be allowed to look outside and see what is going on in the world.

I HAVE discovered that the New Prudery is much narrower and more prudish than the Old Prudery; even of the most dingy and dismal latter days of Puritanism. The discovery interests me not a little, for I always thought I had a pure and perfect and spotless hatred of the ordinary sort of Puritanism. But the pure Puritan is not so grim and negative and repressive as the pure Progressive. The New Prudery does not come out of stale sects or old shabby chapels: it comes out of all the new clubs, new leagues, new guilds of art and culture, new summer schools of science and philanthropy. It is altogether a thing of the Future; or at least of the Futurists, who think they will dominate the Future. It is even notably a thing of the young, and, what is far more extraordinary, of the young who would call themselves the free. And the Ten Commandments of the Christian, or even the Ten Hundred Commandments of the Puritan, are themselves like perfect freedom compared with the terrorism and rigidity of its new Taboos.

I will give a practical case to prove the sober truth

ON THE NEW PRUDERY

of what I say. A certain lady, who happened to be looking after the child of a younger lady, discovered the infant to be showing a dark and morbid interest in the story of Joan of Arc. The younger lady belonged to this school which prides itself upon being young; not at all in the sense in which the poet speaks of drinking ale in the country of the young, but rather in that curious country of the young where nobody is allowed to drink ale, but either cold water or cocktails—sometimes winding up with arsenic. In short, she had all the most progressive ideas, and she, the lady who was the mother, informed the other lady, who was acting *in loco parentis*, that the following rules must be strictly observed in the teaching, or for that matter, the playtime, of her child. (1) The child must never read fairy-tales or be allowed to hear about fairies. (2) The child must never hear of the very existence of fighting in any form. (3) The child must be strictly guarded from the shameful rumour that there is such a thing as religion or religious beliefs. I will leave the lady confronted with the problem of narrating, under these limitations, the historical story of St. Joan of Arc. The child must not hear of the childhood of St. Joan, when she played round the tree of the fairies; the child must not hear of the life of St. Joan, which I fear was largely occupied with fighting; the child must not hear of the

ON THE NEW PRUDERY

death of St. Joan, which was a result of the fighting and raises the very indelicate question of faith; or what St. Joan was fighting about and what she was dying for. I should like to see the expurgated or bowdlerized life of the fifteenth-century heroine.

Now it is nonsense to say that this sort of thing is liberal or emancipated; it is nonsense to pretend that it is not much more narrow and obscurantist than the blackest pessimism of the worst days of Puritanism. I am not comparing it with my own religion: I am comparing it with the religion I dislike most; and I say it is quite certain that the Puritanism I dislike most was a wild burst of freedom, and a paradise of pleasures and liberties, compared with this sort of thing. I do not like the Scottish Sabbath, or the old dark shuttered houses, or the long days passed in reading dull divinity or in doing nothing. But they were better fun than this; they were a great deal more free than this. For instance, it is not a plea for Puritanism, it is a part of the proverbial protest against Puritanism, to say that people were only allowed to read the Bible, especially on Sundays. But the Bible is an *Arabian Nights* of romantic and passionate stories compared with the limitations laid down by this enlightened person. The Bible is an *Encyclopaedia Britannica* of varied topics and multitudinous human interests compared with the

ON THE NEW PRUDERY

amount of knowledge that can be conveyed under those new conditions. Nobody could read the Bible without gaining a glorious mass of information about fighting, about faith, about religions true and false, about mystical or magical or mysterious beings such as hover round man in all the legends and literature of the world. The little boys who grew up in the dark Calvinistic houses of our great-grandfathers did, in actual fact, grow up with their heads full of a noble noise of conflict and crisis; valiant and vigorous action described in the grandest English that our national history has known; the noise of the captains and the shouting; the chariots of Israel and the horsemen thereof; and he that drew a bow at a venture and smote the king between the joints of the harness; and he whose driving was known from afar off, for he drove furiously. That, under all its other disadvantages, is what I call being educated; certainly it is being much better educated than a miserable little prig who must not be told that Joan of Arc carried a battle-banner, but must be assured that she only carried an umbrella.

So far to limit war literature is simply to limit literature, and the Bible alone would be a better training than a silly scrupulosity that should remain ignorant of the war-horse whose neck was clothed with thunder, or that wild quarry that laughed at the shaking of the

ON THE NEW PRUDERY

spear. It is odd, however, to remember that in those dark Puritan homes of which I have spoken, another exception was proverbially made, and children, even on Sundays, were allowed to read *The Pilgrim's Progress*. That is, they were allowed to read what may be a fairy-tale: what is certainly a fighting tale and what has actually, according to countless testimonies, been no bad substitute for other nursery novels or romances. Anyhow, a child with a free soul might find something in it of a fighting spirit; and never forget the instant when Apollyon straddled over the whole breadth of the way; or the dying Greatheart gave up his sword and all the trumpets sounded for him on the other side. I would rather be a dingy, dusty, bewildered, benighted seventeenth-century Calvinistic tinker than never have heard in this vale of tears any distant note of that trumpet.

The intellectual interest of this bit of bigotry lies in this: that the new philosophies and new religions and new social systems cannot draw up their own plans for emancipating mankind without still further enslaving mankind. They cannot carry out even what they regard as the most ordinary reforms without instantly imposing the most extraordinary restrictions. We are to live under a sort of martial law lest we should hear of anything martial. All our children are to be

ON THE NEW PRUDERY

watched by the grimmest of all governesses lest they should be told, even by accident, of a fairy or a fight with robbers. Everybody is to be drilled with an anti-militarist discipline which is quite as stiff and strict as a militarist discipline. All the nursery stories are to be subject to a Censor, who shall object if they are too pretty, as the very dullest sort of Victorian or philistine Censor would object if they were too ugly. A new Mrs. Grundy shall arise, who will blush not at natural facts, but only at preternatural fancies. A new Paul Pry will be sent to sneak about our houses, or look through our keyholes, to find out whether (in some den of infamy) a child is being taught to admire courage. Whatever we may think of the relative claims of the two religions, one fact is now logically self-evident: that the new religion, every bit as much as the old religion, will be a persecuting religion. It will be, by its very nature, a thing fighting for its life against the normal forces of human nature; every bit as much as has been alleged of any system of asceticism or self-denial in the past. It is indeed a case in which extremes meet; though, in truth, extremes often meet because they are much less extreme than people suppose. The modern Pacifist is really very like the ancient Puritan; the man who now has a horror of all theology is very like the man who then had a horror of all things except

ON THE NEW PRUDERY

theology. And the proof is in this practical case. The old Calvinist, like the new Communist, really did forbid children to read stories about fairies. The old Puritan, like the new peace-man, really would forbid boys to read a penny dreadful about pirates. This new idealist is not even new, in the manner of the babe unborn. He is our own Puritan great-grandfather dreadfully risen from the dead.

THE common or garden German may be described as the beer-garden German. As such, I love and embrace him. Just lately, and at historic intervals, he becomes the bear-garden German. As such I regard him with a love more mystical and distant, and would prefer to avoid his embrace. For the embraces of bears, even in the most festive and gorgeously illuminated bear-gardens, are apt to show that over-emphasis, or excess of pressure, which is the fault of the German temperament.

Now, ever since Herr Hitler began to turn the beer-garden into a bear-garden, there has been an increasing impression on sensitive and intelligent minds that something very dangerous has occurred. A particular sort of civilization has turned back towards barbarism. When I say this, I do not mean what half a hundred intellectuals of the enlightened and emancipated Press mean, or imagine that they mean. I do not mean that fighting, or fierce anger, or the unmasking of the respectable, or even the despoliation of the rich, is necessarily barbarism. It is not; even if it is wrong, it is not.

ON THE RETURN OF THE BARBARIAN

It might arise from a perfectly rational, and indeed from a perfectly traditional, inheritance of human protest. Nor do I mean (God forbid) that modern banks, or modern books, or remarkable realistic studies of this or that, or the perpetually shifting fog that they call physical science, or the cranks who run naked because they have never thought about clothes, or the louts who go Communist because they have never thought about private property, or the wasters who sponge on six wives and call it Free Love—I do not mean that any of that sort of liberty or laxity or liberal-mindedness has ever had anything to do with civilization. The very word civilization is from a city. The very nature of a city is something that has to be built according to a plan; and with some sacrifice from the citizens in fitting in with that plan. There are many modern things called Culture which one would be glad to see destroyed by Goths and Vandals, let alone by mild modern Germans, who do whatever they are told. There are many modern books, advertised as masterpieces of literary art, which I should be glad to see destroyed by rats and worms, let alone Hitlerites. There are many idiotic experiments in nakedness, in the northern climate of Europe, which might well be exterminated by germs, let alone by Germans.

No; the essential point does not concern any of

ON THE RETURN OF THE BARBARIAN

those questions, such as arose also in the fall of Roman civilization; questions in which the barbarians might happen to be right, and the decayed citizens of civilization might happen to be wrong. It is none the less true that civilized men must defend civilization against any sort of barbarians. And the reason is, that civilization retains the power of curing its own diseases, whereas it is only by an accident that the barbarians may be free from the disease. If England is prostrate with influenza, it may conceivably (of course) be invaded by Eskimos, who may conceivably (of course) be genetically immune from influenza. But that does not mean that Eskimo culture is really superior to English culture. It does not even mean that Eskimos could guard against influenza so promptly or practically as Englishmen could guard against a return of influenza. The advantage is with our culture—even germ-culture. The bother with the barbarian is that he is right by accident, and sometimes does not even know why he is right. The case for the civilized man is that he is wrong by his own fault, and knows it is his own fault; and, knowing that he is wrong, may have some reason to put himself right. Never be merely on the side of barbarism, for it always means the destruction of all that men have ever understood, by men who do not understand it.

ON THE RETURN OF THE BARBARIAN

That is the sense in which a detached and dispassionate person, watching that strange turn of the tide in the centre of tribal Germany, will be disposed to suspect a tragedy. The Germans have done many things that many of us may think right, but there is nothing to hold them back from doing anything that all of us think wrong. There have been many such ethical eddies in history, and the trouble with the German ones is that they have always been more ethnical than ethical. That is, they have perpetually turned back, by a sort of introspective or centripetal movement, from the judgment of Christendom to the judgment of Germany. The debate always turned from considering whether the German was really right to considering how really right the real German had always been. It is quite true that the word German is used to cover a vast variety of tribes and trends, about which historians may debate as they please. But it is a manifest modern fact that this racial mass has been, even if only recently, solidified by a staggering sense of triumph, and a hypnotic faith, that it is all one people. Oddly enough, indeed, its really staggering triumph was followed very rapidly by a much more staggering defeat. But that is the advantage of hypnotism. That is the charm of illusion and the compelling power of unreality. The Germans, not being realistic, have al-

ON THE RETURN OF THE BARBARIAN

ready forgotten that they were defeated ten years ago; but they still remember vividly that they were victorious fifty years ago. That is the advantage of being a sentimentalist. You only remember what you like to remember. It is also the advantage of being a barbarian.

When we say that something must have its head, we generally say it of some animal with a rather inferior head. A horse may occasionally have its head, but a horseman who had his head, in that blind and instinctive sense, would probably have his head punched by other and more judicious horsemen. The danger of the emergence of anything really barbaric in the world is that we do not know what it will do next, or where it will turn up at last; just as we do not know whether a runaway horse will be stopped by the nearest policeman or will be smashed in a shop-window two miles away. And this, let it be noted, has very little to do with the original cause of the accident, or with whether it was the sort of incident we should call an excuse for the horse, or even a justification for the horse. The horse might have been subjected to a shock that no normal horse could be expected to stand. There would always be, in judging the horse as a horse, a difference between his having shied because a baby threw a ball, or bolted because an anarchist threw a bomb. But we are still judging, justly or unjustly, according to what

ON THE RETURN OF THE BARBARIAN

is called the nature of the beast. Now Barbarism is a beast, and has the nature of the beast. It is not peculiar to any particular movement among Teutons, any more than among Turks or Mongols or Slavs. But in all of these we can mark the moment of history when men turned back towards it, and delayed for centuries the civilization of mankind. What is really disquieting about this new note of narrow nationalism or tribalism in the north is that there is something shrill and wild about it, that has been heard in those destructive crises of history. There are many marks by which anybody of historical imagination can recognize the recurrence: the monstrous and monotonous omnipresence of one symbol, and that a symbol of which nobody knows the meaning; the relish of the tyrant for exaggerating even his own tyranny, and barking so loud that nobody can even suspect that his bark is worse than his bite; the impatient indifference to all the former friends of Germany, among those who are yet making Germany the only test—all these things have a savour of savage and hasty simplification, which may, in many individuals, correspond to an honest indignation or even idealism, but which, when taken altogether, give an uncomfortable impression of wild men who have merely grown weary of the complexity that we call civilization.

A LETTER from a lady, in the correspondence column of the *News Chronicle*, picked out the present writer with a withering distinction; a spotlight calculated to put him on the spot. Miss Florence Underwood, secretary of the Women's Freedom League, was complaining of the present condition of affairs in which "an increasing number of women are having a fierce struggle for economic independence and are becoming more and more embittered because of irritating discrimination against women workers." In spite of this, it appears, men, even including leader-writers on Liberal papers, continue to talk in a tone of heartless heartiness. And this reminds Miss Underwood of the darker passages in my own past; and she thus recalls them:

"In pre-suffrage days Mr. G. K. Chesterton inquired from his wife, his mother, and his charwoman if any of them wanted the vote. Each of them said 'No!' and Mr. Chesterton remained more convinced than ever that practically all women did not want the vote."

This is something of a simplification of what Mr. Chesterton really said; but it is true that the principle

ON WOMEN WHO VOTE

of what he said was very simple. But what interests him now is that the sequel of his deplorable obstructionism ought to be very simple indeed. Despite his desperate conspiracy with charwomen and mothers and such riff-raff, women did obtain the Vote, and have now had it for very much more than a decade. If it was valuable enough to be worth the frantic efforts of the years during which it was being sought, we may well suppose that it has been equally valuable during the long stretch of years after it was obtained. The whole point of the position of the Suffragists and the Women's Freedom League was that the electoral franchise was the determining political power, without which woman was powerless, and with which woman would be powerful. Therefore, since she has now got that power, we may presume that it is all over but the shouting; the shouting of happy and victorious Amazons, now ruling the world by right. So that is all as it should be. All is gas and gaiters, as the reporter said after the meeting of Broad Church Bishops to express sympathy with the Oxford Group Movement. All's well that ends well, as the hostess remarked when the brilliant *raconteur* became a Trappist monk. "All clear," as the railway porter shouted after reading a book by Miss Gertrude Stein. Woman has obtained the power to rule; and she is ruling.

ON WOMEN WHO VOTE

But what does this mean, and what strange words are these? ". . . an increasing number of women are having a fierce struggle for economic independence and are becoming more and more embittered because of irritating discrimination against women workers. . . ." But how can it be that more and more women are more and more embittered, and are yet impotent to remove the cause of their bitterness? Why do they not use all their lovely Votes and sweep it away? How can a mere leader-writer on the *News Chronicle*, a member of the miserable minority of males, stand in Miss Underwood's path in any particular? Why does she not lift her terrible Vote and fell him to the ground? There is evidently something very wrong in the situation; and I for one begin to wonder, in my perverse way, whether my charwoman and my mother may not have had a good deal of feminine intuition about the facts. I never said that the charwoman had no real grievances. I certainly never said that working women were not under various forms of economic oppression. On the contrary, I incessantly asserted that all the working people were under an economic oppression, and I asserted it in days when it was a far less fashionable doctrine than it is now. I did not think, and I did not think that they thought, that the economic evil could be cured by giving a franchise as a franchise to a female as a female.

ON WOMEN WHO VOTE

A superficial reading of Miss Underwood's dark and mysterious complaints might easily mislead anyone into fancying that I was right.

To speak plainly, can the Suffragist lady now tell me exactly *how* she uses the Suffrage, either (1) to avoid being sweated by an employer; or (2) to avoid being excluded by a Trade Union? Whatever be the rights or wrongs of sex discrimination in economic organizations, whether capitalist or proletarian, exactly how does anybody alter the pressure of economic organizations today by means of the Parliamentary Vote? Does one do it by heckling one isolated local M.P., who is probably a perfectly helpless private Member, and badgering him into making promises which his own party will not allow him to keep? Does one think it sufficient to vote for an official Labour Party, probably led by Socialists as fiery and militant and swift in action as Mr. Ramsay MacDonald? Or must one abandon them in despair and vote for the Communists? Yet it is not necessary to agree with the Communists, in order to have either Miss Underwood's concern for sex equality or my own concern for greater economic equality. In any case, the vote has done precious little to help either of us towards any sort of economic equality. I think it was General Flora Drummond, the most militaristic of militants, who cried aloud in in-

ON WOMEN WHO VOTE

dignation because a great Coal Strike or Railway Strike broke out in the industrial field, in complete disregard of the success of Female Suffrage in the political field. She actually called it, I think, an insult to the Parliamentary power which she was wearing so proudly, like one of her military medals. In plain fact, she had only just discovered, in the example of the Strike, that the Vote she had won was as futile as the charwoman or I could have told her it was. In other words, the charwoman was right; and I was right about the charwoman.

I am not likely to delude myself with any fantastic hope that Miss Underwood would ever agree that the charwoman was right, and still less that I was right; but I might be tempted to add some further comment, for the benefit of anybody who can bring himself to believe that I might have been right then, or that I might possibly be right now. I might be disposed to point out that even the present grievance of Miss Underwood, though more practical and realistic than the vague romance of the Vote, is vitiated by being founded on certain false assumptions. It is very tenable that women and men should receive the same treatment when they are both in the same sense proletarians in the industrial market. But it is not self-evident that they are both equally fitted to be proletarians in the

ON WOMEN WHO VOTE

industrial market. And, above all, it is not self-evident that they ought either of them to be proletarians in the industrial market at all. Miss Underwood and her friends always talk as if being a wage-slave in the corrupt and decaying capitalist system were a sort of beatific benefit, first bestowed on men in a spirit of favouritism, and then withheld from women in a spirit of jealousy or repression. Even the happy and radiant condition of trade and commerce today cannot convince me that this view is to be accepted as a first principle.

In other words, there is just one little hitch between us: that what she calls economic independence I call economic dependence. The condition of dependence is involved in the condition of employment; especially under the extreme modern menace of unemployment. It is not an insult especially levelled at women; it is an insecurity and injustice belonging to the whole recent phase of the government of men. To found a saner society, in which men and women work on their own property and not only on the property of the rich, is a very steep and challenging sort of project. But I have never repented of having said that more Votes would do little to bring it about; nor should I think that the Suffragists had come any nearer to bringing it about, even if they could have turned all wives and mothers into the well-paid servants of a big Trust.

I SHALL go down to my neglected pauper's grave continuing to praise, honour, and glorify the name of Mr. H. G. Wells; even if he is by that time himself in the great Cosmic Crematorium and Pagan Pantheon, where will stand the sacred urns of the founders of the New State. And this will not be merely for the obvious reasons. It is not only, though it is very largely, because he filled my youth with the fairy-tales of science, which are so much more delightful when you have really discovered that they are fairy-tales. It will not be only because he has interpreted the mind of the Englishman who, even by the confession of the modern newspapers, has been turned by modern conditions into what is called a Little Man. Alas, it is indeed his manhood that has become little. He is not allowed to have anything else on a small scale, except himself. He is not now allowed to be a small shopkeeper, or a small farmer, or a small craftsman; so, naturally, he has become a small man. But what H. G. Wells did bring out, in burning colours of reality, is the fact that even that small man can also be great. For though the

ON THE FALLACY OF EUGENICS

Machine may grind the work of man's hands into a dust of indistinguishable atoms, it cannot alter the fact that Man is not a small thing. It cannot alter the fact that the Man is greater than the Machine, even at the moment when the Machine has killed him. Nor, again, is it merely because Mr. Wells has brought out this great truth, of the greatness of apparently trivial people, by a most delightful comedy of contrasts in the characters of those people. It is not even because he created the character of the aunt of the hero of *Tono-Bungay*; I have forgotten her name, but I still know her nature. I know her very well; and she was one of the consolations of life; a real triumph of tenderness and power. It is not even because he disposed of a celebrated Continental Pacifist with a vigorous phrase I have never forgotten: "*'Au-dessus de la mêlée,'*" as the man up the tree said while the wild bull was goring his sister. At the moment, at least, it is for none of these things that I feel impelled to pour out a pagan libation before that dignified pagan urn, if the time should ever come (may it be far distant) when he has provided himself with an urn. My gratitude is grounded on the grand and impressive fact that it was Mr. H. G. Wells, and not any of us poor slaves of superstition, who long ago pointed out the gaping and ghastly scientific fallacy in almost all that is now being revived,

ON THE FALLACY OF EUGENICS

under the labels of Eugenics and Heredity.

The point is this; and it has never been answered. To judge by the way in which politicians and publicists discuss such matters, it has never even been understood. The fact is that it is totally impossible to argue from the fact of physical inheritance to any sort of result other than the very simplest physical features. We all know that a positive physical element, which is also an entirely simple element, may be inherited; though even then it is unsafe to prophesy that it will be inherited. We all know what is meant by saying that the Robinsons run to tall men; or that red hair is for some reason recurrent and even frequent in the family of Pickleby. But nobody wants indefinite length as such, or humanity measured by the yard; and red hair may accompany any cast of features from that of Judas Iscariot to that of Bernard Shaw. All the things that are worth having, such as health and beauty and happiness and virtue, are all, without exception, things produced by a particular proportion between different things. It is said of a newborn baby with affection that he has his mother's eyes, with tolerance that he has his father's nose, with faint alarm that he has his great-uncle's jaw. But even if his mother were as beautiful as Helen of Troy, her eyes would not make him as beautiful as Paris or Apollo. Beauty in a face depends

ON THE FALLACY OF EUGENICS

on how the eyes and other features fit in with each other; and if all is devastated by Uncle Humphrey's jaw, the result will be disastrous even if Uncle Humphrey himself was a very handsome, though trying, old gentleman. For these harmonies which we human beings value, as beauty or virtue or the rest, do indeed form part (as some of us superstitiously believe) of the ultimate purpose of God, but they do not form part of what may be called the obvious and ostensible purpose of Nature. So far as that is concerned, they are only tunes or melodies that we happen to like; combinations of colour and form which we happen to admire. Yet the same is true even of what seems so simple and natural a thing as health. It is quite useless for eugenists to tell us that healthy parents always have healthy children; and especially that mentally healthy parents always have mentally healthy children. If we have lived long enough in the real world, we simply know that it is not true.

But the point is that the reason is really the same. Mental sanity, like bodily beauty, is not a separate positive concrete character that can be carried on like a pattern of big bones or a racial colouring of black curly hair. The question about any individual, born of any family, is not whether he inherits elements from that family; as no doubt he does. It is, as Shakespeare

ON THE FALLACY OF EUGENICS

said, the question of whether "the elements were so mixed in him" as to produce a success or failure by our special standard of spiritual values. There is nobody with any wide circle of acquaintances, who does not know families in which the father and the mother are both normal, sane, and even splendid specimens, but in which for some reason something has gone wrong with the full psychological development of one or two of the children. But what has gone wrong is not the inheritance of a positive quality. It is not even the inheritance of a negative quality; such as is implied in the very vague phrase about feeble-mindedness; for it is often obvious that the father and mother and the family generally were not in the least feeble-minded. What has gone wrong in some manner, we can only suppose, is the tendency to achieve proportion. There has been too much of something; too little of something else, and the combination necessary for normal activity is thrown out of balance. The son of a sane man is often mad, because he has the right scruples in the wrong place. The son of a handsome man is often ugly, because he has the right features in the wrong face.

Now it is true that Mr. Wells, in the early work to which I refer, did not go into all this matter as I have done; nor do I make him for a moment responsible for my own irresponsible speculations. But he did,

ON THE FALLACY OF EUGENICS

all that long time ago (I think it was in the book called *Mankind in the Making*), point out the essential fact which all the eugenists seem to have forgotten all over again. We breed cows for milk; and not for a moral balance of particular virtues in the cow. We breed pigs to turn them into pork, not to exhibit their portraits as pictures of perfect and harmonious beauty. In other words, we can breed cows and pigs precisely because we cannot really criticize cows and pigs. We cannot judge them from the point of view of the Cow Concept or the Pig Ideal. Therefore we cannot, and do not, criticize them in the way in which we criticize our fellow-creatures (always provided, of course, that they are our poorer fellow-creatures) when we call them feeble-minded; or when we betray our own feeble-mindedness by calling them Unfit. For the very word Unfit reveals the weakness of the whole of this pseudo-scientific position. We should say that a cow is fit to provide us with milk; or that a pig is unfit to provide us with pork. But nobody would call a cow fit without naturally adding what she was fit for. Nobody would call up the insanely isolated vision of the Unfit Pig in the abstract. But when we talk about human beings, we are bound to break off the sentence in the middle; we are bound to call them Unfit in the abstract. For we know how varied, how complex, and how

ON THE FALLACY OF EUGENICS

controversial are the questions that arise about the functions for which they should be fitted. All this is very obvious, and very old; I said it all myself twenty years ago; and Mr. Wells, as I have noted, said part of it much better than I could. But since there seems to be a queer revival of such things, a belated and benighted renascence of these fads I fancied were forgotten, it is as well to repeat our unanswered answer to the creed behind such barbarous tricks; for they are not confined to the curious commonwealth of Mr. Hitler.

It has been noted here that there are certain pockets in history; periods which we do not explore, or episodes that we never even discover, though they may lie very near to ourselves. I have climbed to the top of what might be called either a small mountain or an enormous hill, which stood up against the sky in the shape of a perfect cone; so that I could have sworn from below that its sides were as straight as the sides of the Great Pyramid. And I could hardly believe my eyes, when I came to climb it, and found myself in valley after valley, a series of vast hollows or depressions invisible from the plains below. There are pockets in history as there are in hills; and, as I remarked in a recent article, they are very often quite close to us in time, though veiled, like the other folds in space, by a sort of optical illusion. I could give a great many examples of what I mean; I take the first that occurs to me, which I found most clearly presented in a book by Mr. Roger Fry, on the history of French Art. Very few people have any reason to recall the curious and brief episode, which may be called, in rather a special and narrow sense,

ON THE CLASSICISM OF THE TERROR

the period of French Classical Art. I do not mean the large cultural sense, in which we might fairly say that almost all French Art is Classical Art. I do not mean the general result, which prevailed in a hundred ways after the Renaissance. I mean a particular result that prevailed in a very precise way, just after the Revolution.

It happens that I have always been much more in sympathy with the French Revolution than most Englishmen; or, for that matter, by this time, many Frenchmen. I think that, with all its violence, and with some pedantry of the sort that is worse than violence, it was a necessary liberation of public life from a decadent feudalism that grew more oppressive as it grew less genuine. I think it had the credit of humanizing modern institutions; a credit which many more modern movements have quite falsely claimed. But it is worth noting, in this particular instance, that the real danger of revolution is not so much anarchy as rigidity. This has been emphasized, and even exaggerated, in talk about the tyrant who is raised to power by a mob. It is more interesting to note it in a detached and even abstract matter like art. The revolutionary fountain, which sprang or spurted so freely, froze much too soon. It froze into a sort of formal iceberg, looking like a marble pillar. In struggling out of the feudal forests,

ON THE CLASSICISM OF THE TERROR

or the network of the old despotic diplomacies, the rebels had perpetually called on the gods and heroes of Pagan antiquity; and all their ideas of culture were modelled on the marble severity of the old republics. The consequence was that, when the Revolution conquered, this cold classicism conquered with it, and seems to have tolerated no counter-revolution against itself. Thus there was a sort of tyranny of David, which lasted longer than the tyranny of Robespierre. The Academies of Art absolutely forbade any artist to draw anybody except in a toga or a tunic. All the walls of picture galleries and private houses were covered with a sort of pattern of the Greek nose, as monotonous as the Greek key. It was sometimes considered, apparently, a sort of treason to the Republic and the Rights of Man even to remember any other periods in history except those of Harmodius or Timoleon or Brutus. It is clear, even from Mr. Fry's book, which does not deal with politics, that the first Romantic painters had quite a struggle against the new formalism; so entirely frozen and yet so entirely fresh. The Romantics felt themselves imprisoned in a Greek temple, exactly as the Revolutionists had felt themselves imprisoned in a Gothic crypt.

The Romantics, though themselves often more revolutionary than the Revolutionists, were forced to find

ON THE CLASSICISM OF THE TERROR

an outlet, even if it were an outlet into places and periods then counted barbarous or superstitious. There began to appear, in the French painting of the nineteenth century, scenes that recalled the dark gold and purple of the Byzantine Empire, of mosaics and basilicas; the historical pictures were filled with the mystical diadem of Charlemagne or the wild, dark horses of Attila. In the world of art at least, the paradox was complete. They found light from the Dark Ages and liberty from the phantoms of the kings; and even of the tyrants. If the pictures of those early nineteenth-century painters, such as Delacroix, seem almost intolerably melodramatic, and give a refined shiver to whole generations of Impressionists and Post-Impressionists, it must always be remembered that they also were Revolutionists; they were in revolt against the frigid and frostbitten art imposed by the Revolution. Delacroix's celebrated picture of Liberty fighting on the barricades is supposed to represent the overthrow of Royalist tyranny in the streets; but it does represent the overthrow of Republican tyranny in the art-schools. The same quaint contradiction, along with the same real excuse, could be found, of course, in the Romantics of literature. Victor Hugo lifted the very gargoyles of Notre Dame high above the Classic platitudes of the Pantheon. He cursed medievalism with his intellect,

ON THE CLASSICISM OF THE TERROR

and blessed it with his imagination.

This small and neglected episode in the history of French culture is worth remembering for many reasons just now. It had a great deal to do with the first imaginative gropings of that intellectual revival which was represented in France by Lacordaire and Montalembert, and in England by the somewhat parallel tendency of the Oxford Movement. But it also seems to me worth remembering, in connexion with something much more recent, much more revolutionary, and to all appearance quite rabidly the reverse of it. Indeed, it is something that manages to be at once the reverse of all Romanticism and the reverse of all Classicism. Yet it is something with which we are extremely familiar as a fact; while we tend only too much to treat all these historical hints of similar things in the past as if they were fictions or fables. Yet the Republican tyranny of the school of David was a fact; and even if it were a fable, there would be a moral to the fable.

Just as the French Revolution claimed to have a new and special revolutionary art, so the Russian Revolution still claims to have a new and special revolutionary art. In both cases, the art is as narrow as it is new; or a great deal more narrow than it is new. That is, perhaps, the one and only characteristic that is

ON THE CLASSICISM OF THE TERROR

common to the two. It seems as if there were simply no chance for a young Bolshevik artist, unless he wants to draw horrible pictures of huge oppressive machines, just a little too dull to be merely instruments of torture. Exactly in the same way, there once seemed to be no chance for a young French artist, unless he happened to want to draw the draperies of Cato as he stabbed himself with the expression of a Stoic, or the hard profile of Scaevola as he stretched an extremely muscular arm over the fire of Lars Porsena. The artistic advantage seems to me to be very much with the Jacobins, rather than the Bolsheviks. The muscles of Scaevola, though tiresome, are more interesting than the machines of Stalin; for they are at least alive. Upon the faded drapery of Cato there lingers some light of ancient and eternal laws of relation and composition, and something that will always remind us of the possibilities of grace and dignity. The Classicism that became so strangely stiff and brittle, just after the French Revolution, was at least derived from a great past, and referred remotely to something that was sometimes not only ancient, but noble. It was better than an art which boasts of being, not only modern, but ignoble. It was better than an æsthetic of Communism, which picks out for worship the basest and most brutal of all the

ON THE CLASSICISM OF THE TERROR

inventions of Capitalism. But the moral is that revolt seems to produce suddenly an astonishing intellectual intolerance; and that what was at first on fire with politics turns into something quite cold and conservative in art.

A VERY shrewd and forcible little book called *Town to Country*, by Mr. G. C. Heseltine, happens to lie before me and to form an excellent text for that particular sort of truth that is most needed at the moment. It was published not long ago by Burns, Oates and Washbourne, and it carries the highly practical and opportune sub-title of "A Guide for Townsmen who Seek a Living on the Land." It also carries the playful motto, "The time has come, the Walrus said." Probably the author had in mind some of the implications of the great imaginative lyric from which he quotes. It will be remembered that the two great Victorian monsters, in that poem, being afflicted with a nineteenth-century sentimentalism, and apparently with a nineteenth-century helplessness, "wept like anything to see such quantities of sand." That is the grand old romantic emotion with which Byron and Alfred de Musset did really regard the infinite sands of the desert. But it may not unfairly be said that there was nothing very fruitful, either in the sands of the desert or in the sentiment of the poets. I do not underrate the value of

ON THE RETURN TO THE LAND

their vision, from an imaginative point of view, but it did turn the minds of nineteenth-century men (or at least of nineteenth-century poets) too exclusively in the direction of deserts. The great romantics said many sad and splendid and profound things about the sands that run through the glass of time, or spread themselves before the path of pilgrims; they gave many great landscapes in a flash or the stroke of a brush, like that of Swinburne, "In a land of sand and ruin and gold." Unfortunately, at this moment, we have gone off the gold, we find an inadequate substitute in the sand, and we are uncomfortably near to the ruin.

In a word, what was recently called "the love of nature" had become, for the moderns, very much too exclusively the love of nature sterile; of nature standing still; in short, the very opposite of the medieval mystical truth of *Natura Naturans*. The romantic poets were real poets. We do not mean to sneer at them, when we say that they were persons of peculiar sensibility. But it is profoundly true that they were often content to gaze across a desert; and "weep like anything to see such quantities of sand." Now there was in old times, and there ought to be in all times, a perfectly natural and spontaneous and spirited reply to this. There ought to be, at any given moment, a large number of poets and philosophers "who laughed like anything to see

ON THE RETURN TO THE LAND

such quantities of land." There ought to be a normal exaltation at the hospitality and opportunity of the earth; there has been in almost all other ages and societies such joy expressed in a hundred poetical forms, from ale-house songs about wagoning and harvesting to long didactic poems about milking cows or keeping bees. The peculiar trouble of these times, as distinct from almost all other times, is that the mere sight of these agricultural opportunities does not lift the heart; and men do not laugh like anything to see such quantities of land. There was a time when they could excuse themselves, by saying that there was not enough land to see. But so much of England has now simply gone out of cultivation that it might almost as well be a new country as one of the oldest countries, with one of the oldest cultures, in the great Roman scheme of the West. It is not now the new countries, but rather the old countries, that cry out for the plough.

In fact, the present condition of our fields is such that a man might very well imitate the Walrus, and weep to see such quantities of land; of land about as barren as sand. And if we ask what is the cause of this strange and startling desolation in the most highly civilized States of the modern world, we shall of course find ourselves entangled in any number of political quarrels, which are often little better than the quar-

ON THE RETURN TO THE LAND

rels of politicians. But, behind all this, there remains the real historical fact; that the culture of the country has been artificially changed; and not for the better. I shall probably be misunderstood if I say that the culture was agriculture. It will be supposed to signify that the most cultured people were clowns and bumpkins. But it was not so. Whatever were the faults of the aristocratic England of the last three centuries, it was agricultural, even when it was aristocratic. The gentlemen read the Georgics of Virgil, while the yokel carried them out. It was an unfair division of the fruits of the earth; but both the gentleman and the yokel were interested in the fruits of the earth. And there did in fact grow up, even under a rule of squires, which I shall always think more ignoble than a commonwealth of peasants, a perfectly real and practical art and science of the earth. The crafts of the countryside were practised by the common country people. They were arts as well as crafts. They were arts by this acid and actual test of all arts; that some men could do them very well and some men could not. Things like thatching or broadcast sowing were arts by which a man won local fame; as he might win it by weaving carpets or carving statuettes. In a word, the Craftsman was forgotten, in the country as well as the town. There is another allegory in that old nonsense poem of our nursery about

ON THE RETURN TO THE LAND

the incongruous creatures who wept to see a quantity of sand. The Victorians, caring only for their vision of nonsense, really thought only of the Walrus. They managed to forget the Carpenter.

That is the basic tragedy of our time, which can only be cured by a return to practical crafts like carpentry and thatching and ploughing and getting a living on the land. But I took a text from Mr. Heseltine's excellent little pamphlet, because he addresses himself directly to the question of how so difficult a thing may be done. Indeed, his own title of *Town to Country* really expresses the whole difficulty, as it confronts many people even in the country, and practically all people in the town. I will not attempt here to deal with the details of his very sensible advice; I will only mention one general doubt or difficulty, which I believe to have a huge effect on human hopes in this department.

To put it shortly, the objection almost always raised is, "How can the sort of people brought up in the town ever grow accustomed to the country?" Nobody seems to ask the very simple historical question, "How did the sort of people brought up in the country ever grow accustomed to the town?" If human nature has been hopelessly changed and fixed by less than a hundred years of industrial life, why was it not already hopelessly fixed by hundreds and thousands of years of

ON THE RETURN TO THE LAND

rural life? If it only took one or two generations to lift a man from the low and degraded estate of an honest ploughman into the lofty and superior estate of a shoddy stockbroker, why is it psychologically impossible for the son of the shoddy stockbroker to have the sense to see that it would be better fun to be an honest ploughman—especially when there is obviously no more money in stockbroking? Why, to put it with a pathetic simplicity, if men came up to the town in millions to find more money, should they not have enough of the light of reason to leave the town, when it has no more money? I cannot see on what possible theory of human nature the one social transformation is any more impossible than the other. I know all about the minor arguments about the urban amusements, and Mr. Heseltine deals very soundly with that rather ominous parallel, not to say portent, of the necessity of bread and circuses. But I do not profess to deal here with any such special debates; I merely point out the elementary fact that the rush to the towns was presumably impelled by some sort of human hunger; and it is a human hunger which the towns can no longer feed. As a simple fact, there is only one way in which human hunger can ever be fed. Even in the triumph of towns and trade, it consisted only of securing in towns the tokens by which it

ON THE RETURN TO THE LAND

was possible to live on the country. But nobody ever did live, or ever will live, on anything except the country. It seems tenable that we shall now find it better to do so in a straight rather than a crooked manner.

THERE are some who actually like the Country dialects which State education is systematically destroying. There are some who actually prefer them to the Cockney dialect which State education is systematically spreading. For that is perhaps the most practical and successful effect of our present scheme of public instruction: that the village children no longer talk like ignorant inhabitants of Sussex or Suffolk; they now talk like enlightened inhabitants of Hoxton or Hounds-ditch. Among the eccentric reactionaries who have actually observed this change with regret, a further and more curious fact has also been remarked more than once. An Anglican country parson, a friend of mine, once told me that it was not only a loss of pronunciation, but also of perception. "They not only can't say the word; but they can't hear it"; was the way he put it. Supposing that the virtuous vicar in question had been so ill-advised as to teach his infant school to recite, let us say, the "Dolores" of Swinburne—which I admit is not extremely probable—their intonation would be different; but without any intention to differ. The vicar

ON DIALECT AND DECENCY

would say, "Ringed round with a flame of fair faces." And the Sunday School children would obediently repeat, "Ringed tarned with a flime of fair fices"; with a solid certainty and assurance that this was exactly what he had said. However laboriously he might entreat them to say "faces" and not "fices," they would say "fices" and it would sound to them exactly like "faces."

In short, this sort of thing is not a variation or a form of variety; on the contrary, it is an inability to see that there is any variety. It is not a difference in the sense of a distinction; on the contrary, it is a sudden failure in the power to make any distinction. Whatever is distinct may possibly be distinguished. And Burns and Barnes did manage to be distinguished, in the particular form of distinction commonly called dialect. But the change here in question is something much more formless and much more formidable than anything that could arise from the most uncouth or unlucky of local or rustic accents. It is a certain loss of sharpness, in the ear as well as the tongue; not only a flattening of the speech but a deadening of the hearing. And though it is in itself a relatively small matter, especially as compared with many parallel matters, it is exactly this quality that makes it symbolic in the social problems of today. For one of the deepest troubles of the day is this fact; that something is being com-

ON DIALECT AND DECENCY

mended as a new taste; which is simply the condition which finds everything tasteless. It is sometimes offered almost as if it were a new sense; but it is not really even a new sensibility; it is rather a pride in a new insensibility.

For instance, when some old piece of decorum is abolished, rightly or wrongly, it is always supposed to be completely justified if people become just as dull in accepting the indecency as they were in accepting the decency. If it can be said that the grandchildren "soon get used" to something that would have made the grandfathers fight duels to the death, it is always assumed that the grandchildren have found a new mode of living, whereas those who fought the duel to the death were already dead. But the psychological fact is exactly the other way. The duellists may have been fastidious or even fantastic; but they were frightfully alive. That is why they died. Their sensibilities were vivid and intense, by the only true test of the finer sensibilities, or even of the five senses. And that is that they could feel the difference between one thing and another. It is the livelier eye that can see the difference between peacock-blue and peacock-green; it is the more fatigued eye that may see them both as something very like grey. It is the quicker ear that can detect in any speech the shade between innocence and

ON DIALECT AND DECENCY

irony; or between irony and insult. It is the duller ear that hears all the notes as monotone; and therefore monotonous. Even the swaggering person who was supposed to turn up his nose at everything was at least in a position to sniff the different smells of the world and perhaps to detect their difference. There is the drearier and more detached sort of pride of the other sort of man; who may be said to turn his nose down at everything. For that also is only a more depressing way of turning everything down. It is not a mark of purity of taste, but of absence of taste, to think that cocoa is as good as claret; and, even in the field of morals, it may well have the ultimate nemesis of thinking cocaine as good as cocoa. Even the mere senses, in the merely sensual sense, attest to this truth about vivacity going with differentiation. It is no answer, therefore, to say that you have persuaded a whole crowd of hygienic hikers to be content with cocoa; any more than to say that you have persuaded a whole crowd of drug-fiends to be content with cocaine. Neither of them is the better for pursuing a course which spoils the palate; and probably robs them of a reasonable taste in vintages. But what most modern people do not see is that this dullness in diet and similar things is exactly parallel to the dull and indifferent anarchy in manners and morals. Do not be proud of the fact that

ON DIALECT AND DECENCY

your grandmother was shocked at something which you are accustomed to seeing or hearing without being shocked. There are two meanings of the word "nervous"; and it is not even a physical superiority to be actually without nerves. It may mean that your grandmother was an extremely lively and vital animal; and that you are a paralytic.

We are constantly told, for instance, by the very prosaic paralytics who call themselves Nudists, that people "soon get used" to being degraded, in that particular, to the habits of the beasts of the field. I have no doubt they do; just as they soon get used to being drunkards or drug-fiends or jail-birds or people talking Cockney instead of talking English. Where the argument of the apologist entirely fails is in showing that it is better to get used to an inferior status after losing a superior one. In a hundred ways, recent legislation has ridden roughshod over the instincts of innocent and simple and yet very sensible people. There was a feeling, strangely enough, that men and women might not feel very comfortable when they met as total strangers to discuss some depraved and perhaps disgusting aspect of their natural sex relation. This has already given a good deal of quiet trouble on juries; and we have not seen the end of the trouble yet. Now it will be noted that the objection to female juries never

ON DIALECT AND DECENCY

was an objection to juries being female. There always were female juries. From the first days of legislation a number of matrons were empanelled to decide certain points among each other. The case against mixed juries was a case of embarrassment; and that embarrassment is far more intelligent, far more civilized, far more subtle, far more psychological, than the priggish brutality that disregards it. But in any case it will serve here as an illustration of what I mean. The question is not whether the embarrassment can be so far overcome somehow, that a good many people can discharge the duty somehow. The question is whether the blunting of the sentiment really is a victory for human culture, and not rather a defeat for human culture. Just as the question is not whether millions of little boys in different districts with different dialects can all be taught the same dialect of the Whitechapel Road; but whether that dialect is better than others, and whether it is a good thing to lose the sense of the difference between one dialect and another.

For what we do at least know, in the most fundamental fashion, is that man is man by the possession of these fastidious fancies; from which the free-thinking haddock is entirely emancipated; and by which the latitudinarian turnip is never troubled. To lose the sense of repugnance from one thing, or regard for another,

ON DIALECT AND DECENCY

is exactly so far as it goes to relapse into the vegetation or to return to the dust. But for about fifty or sixty years, nearly all our culture and controversial trend has been conducted on the assumption that as long as we could get used to any sort of caddishness, we could be perfectly contented in being cads. I do not say that all the results of the process have been wrong. But I do say that the test of the process has been wrong from first to last; for it is not a case against the citizen that a man can grow accustomed to being either a savage or a slave.

IF the modern man is indeed the heir of all the ages, he is often the kind of heir who tells the family solicitor to sell the whole damned estate, lock, stock, and barrel, and give him a little ready money to throw away at the races or the night-clubs. He is certainly not the kind of heir who ever visits his estate: and, if he really owns all the historic lands of ancient and modern history, he is a very absentee landlord. He does not really go down the mines on the historic property, whether they are the Caves of the Cave-Men or the Catacombs of the Christians, but is content with a very hasty and often misleading report from a very superficial and sometimes dishonest mining expert. He allows any wild theories, like wild thickets of thorn and briar, to grow all over the garden and even the graveyard. He will always believe modern testimony in a text-book against contemporary testimony on a tombstone. He sells the family portraits with much more than the carelessness of Charles Surface, and seldom knows enough about the family even to save a favourite uncle from the wreck. For the adjective "fast," which was a condem-

ON MAN: HEIR OF ALL THE AGES

nation when applied to profligates, has become a compliment when applied to progressives. I know there are any number of men in the modern world to whom all this does not in the least apply; but the point is that, even where it is obviously applicable, it is not thought particularly culpable. Nevertheless, there are some of us who do hold that the metaphor of inheritance from human history is a true metaphor, and that any man who is cut off from the past, and content with the future, is a man most unjustly disinherited; and all the more unjustly if he is happy in his lot, and is not permitted even to know what he has lost. And I, for one, believe that the mind of man is at its largest, and especially at its broadest, when it feels the brotherhood of humanity linking it up with remote and primitive and even barbaric things.

Mr. Christopher Dawson has written studies of historic and prehistoric problems which have been admired by men distinguished in every way, and especially distinguished from each other. His work has been most warmly praised by critics as different as Dean Inge and Mr. Aldous Huxley and the Rev. C. C. Martindale. But I, for one, value his researches for one particular reason above the rest: that he has given the first tolerably clear and convincing account of the real stages of what his less lucid predecessors loved to call

ON MAN: HEIR OF ALL THE AGES

the Evolution of Religion. Whether myths and mystical cults were really evolved along one consistent line, I do not know. But theories about mythology or cults or mysteries were most certainly not evolved along any consistent line. They cut across each other and almost immediately became a tangle of contradictions. First we had the Sun Myth illuminating everything like the sun, and enabling Bishop Whately to prove that Napoleon was a mythical character. Then we had Herbert Spencer and Grant Allen, who said that everything came from ghosts and graves and the worship of ancestors; and then Professor Frazer, who (with all his genius) could not see the sacred tree for the golden bough. Now whatever else be true of these theories of evolution, they are not evolved. The grave does not grow out of the sun; nor even the oak out of the grave; and on no possible theory is Frazer a development of Spencer. They are contrary guesses; and if there is evidence for all of them (as no doubt there is), the evidence only increases the confusion. Mr. Dawson has ordered the confusion without contradicting the evidence; and his conclusion is that there were, broadly, four stages in the spiritual story of humanity.

The first notion, with which the lowest and most primitive savages seem to have begun, was very like the notion with which many of our Higher Thinkers

ON MAN: HEIR OF ALL THE AGES

hope that all humanity will end. It was a broad belief in what is now called "the spiritual element in life"; in a spirit almost impersonal but still superior to our material minds; of which we may gain encouraging glimpses and visions. This is the stage of the Shaman, or medicine-man, who, as an independent individual mystic, can tap the vast and vague supernatural power that pervades the world. By special magic rites, with special material objects, herbs or stones or what not, he could release the mysterious force. For note that this is not pantheism; the sacred tree is hidden in the wood or the dryad is imprisoned in the tree. Now I could not be content with this magic, whether or no it would suit the Higher Thinkers. But I have no sympathy with a man who has no sympathy with this magic; I count no man large-minded or imaginative who has not sometimes felt like a medicine-man. It is quite natural to me, walking in the woods, to wonder fancifully whether whistling back the note of a certain bird, or tasting the juice of a certain berry, would release a glamour or give back a fairyland. I call that being the heir of all the ages.

The second stage is that of the static archaic culture, in which a whole people live a ritual life, generally founded on the seasons of seed or harvest, in which there is no distinction between sacred and profane,

ON MAN: HEIR OF ALL THE AGES

because ploughing or fishing are religious forms; and no distinction between king and priest, because the Sacred Emperor rules the whole round of ritual life like a god. China and Egypt and other cultures were of that sort. Here again, I should be dissatisfied with a religion that was a pageant of nature; for I feel the soul, in Sir Thomas Browne's noble phrase, as something other than the elements, that owes no homage unto the sun. But I am much more dissatisfied with a man, pretending to be a man of culture, who merely despises that ritual. I can never see the pageant of harvest without feeling that it is religious, and it gratifies me to think that I am feeling like the first Emperor of China. I call that being the heir of all the ages.

The third phase described is the rise of the world religions, the moral and universal religions; for Buddha and Confucius and the Hebrew Prophets and the first Greek philosophers appeared roughly about the same time. And with them appeared the idea expressed in Sir Thomas Browne's phrase: that the soul is greater than the sun. Henceforth the conscience is more than the cosmos. Either it condemns the cosmos, or ignores the cosmos, as in Buddhism; or it gives it a mystical meaning, as in Platonism; or sees it as an instrument for producing a grander good, as in Judaism and Christianity. Now I do not myself care about the Buddhist

ON MAN: HEIR OF ALL THE AGES

extreme, which almost unmakes the world to make the soul. I do not like Nirvana, which seems indistinguishable from death. But I would not be seen dead in a field, not in the field of any paradise, negative or positive, with the man who has no admiration for the superb renunciation of Buddha, or for the Western equivalent, the star-defying despair of the Stoics. No man has really been alive who has not some time felt that the skies might fall, so that the justice within his conscience should be done; and in the richer tapestry of the Christian there is also a dark thread of the Stoic. I call that being the heir of all the ages.

I will not complete the four phases here, because the last deals with the more controversial question of the Christian system. I merely use them as a convenient classification to illustrate a neglected truth: that a complete human being ought to have all these things stratified in him, so long as they are in the right order of importance, and that man should be a prince looking from the pinnacle of a tower built by his fathers, and not a contemptuous cad, perpetually kicking down the ladders by which he climbed.

IT is a beautiful and even blissful thought that, whatever happens, it will never be what the scientific futurists and fatalists have proved to be inevitable and quite certain to happen. Among many examples there has obviously been a recent Nationalist revival, not to say a Nationalist riot, in various parts of Europe, at the very moment when all the prophets of evolutionary ethics had told us that Nationalism was fading from the world and Internationalism fated to take its place. Among the particular examples, we may all have our likes and dislikes; our relative tolerations or impatiences. I may think some services too little recognized, or some successes exaggerated. I think I prefer De Valera to Mussolini; I am sure I prefer Pilsudski to Hitler. I think it a fact of some importance that the Poles defeated Bolshevism in one big battle a long time before the Nazis began to demonstrate against it in small street-fights; and I confess I think that the Battle of Warsaw will figure in history, along with Marathon and Lepanto, as rather more impressive than even that magnificent scene, some days ago, when the

ON THE REAL ANIMAL

Storm Troops, launching that tempest of steel from which they take their title, boldly assailed a number of little boys, assembled for something in the way of a Catholic School-Treat. It is no doubt impressive to know that, henceforward, no children of any superstitious Sunday School will be able to assemble, without the whole armed might of Germany summoning up the courage to attack them. But I still do not think the incident so striking as the stopping of the Red Armies at the moment when they were really ready to overrun Europe. But, so far as my present argument is concerned, it is quite open to anybody to say that in these particular cases my preferences are prejudices. Whether we like or dislike this or that manifestation of the new Nationalism, we can all see that Nationalism has taken a turn that is more or less new. De Valera is quite as national as Mussolini; and the Poles are quite as patriotic as the Prussians; a fact which the world will be wise not to forget.

What interests me just now is a sort of guess about the philosophy behind these things, or, perhaps, rather the difference between a philosophy and a religion. I fancy a religion might really unite nations; as Islam, for instance, has united the most amazingly varied peoples. But Internationalism is not a religion; it is an "ism"; and an "ism" is never a religion. It is an ab-

ON THE REAL ANIMAL

straction without being an absolute. Now, a nation, is a *thing*; it may be a bad thing or a deplorable thing, but it is a thing and not a theory. There are certain ways of linking up living things that are, as it were, along the lines of life; they are coherent in the sense of prehensile; they are not pinned together or pasted together or scientifically wired together; they cling together; they hold on to each other; they grip. And there is always a misunderstanding between the two types of thinkers, those who live on two planes of thought; the people who think of human beings as humanity; and the people who think of humanity as human beings.

Yet the humanitarians might learn the lesson even from the example of humanity. Even in our relations with the other animals, there is a pedantic extension of humanity and a human extension of humanity. I know I am an animal described by the Greeks as an *Anthropos*; not a very perfect specimen for the museum, perhaps; but still, unmistakably of that species. But if the professor, showing people round the museum, points me out as an *Anthropoid*, I experience a chill of doubt and a sense of unreality. I may, in fact, be biologically related to the larger apes in the adjoining cage or glass case; though by this time, I fancy, the professor has found that I am the nephew of a

ON THE REAL ANIMAL

marmoset or the poor relation of a lemur. Let us agree, for the sake of argument, that in a certain sort of abstract scientific classification I am closer to an anthropoid ape than to any other animal. But if anybody says that I am *really* closer to an anthropoid ape than to any other animal, I simply know it is not true. I am very much closer to my dog. I do not, in fact, feel the fine shades in the feelings of an orang-outang; I seldom touch on sentiment and affection in my relations with a chimpanzee; it is but rarely that I take practical advantage of my confidence that a baboon is to be trusted to guard a baby or even to detect a burglar. I know that the relation between a man and a dog is a real relation, and I know that the relation between a man and an anthropoid ape is a theoretical relation; even though the theory may refer to some realities in the scientific world.

And those two animals will serve very well as fables to illustrate what I mean by the difference between a fact and a fad. The dog represents all the realities connected with what is historic. The ape represents all the abstractions connected with what is prehistoric. Historic man, through all his history, has had a dog, and has never forgotten the dog; as may be seen in Tobit or Ulysses. If prehistoric man really had an uncle who was a prehistoric ape, he had completely forgotten it

ON THE REAL ANIMAL

by the time he came to be historic man. Indeed, I think he never even discovered his uncle until he began to shoot him in Africa, late in the eighteenth century. Now, according to whether men feel that difference between an experience and a notion, they will or will not understand the good and evil of a nation; for a nation is not a notion. You may say that nations do more harm than good, as you may say that dogs are more nuisance than they are worth; you can say that it is barbarous that nationalities should be free to fight, as you can say that it is barbarous that dogs should be kept to hunt. But you are dealing with a very different thing from any theory about how living creatures could be related, or ought to be related, or may some day be related; you are dealing with living creatures that are related.

It is quite true that the culture of Europe comes from something that is much older than all the modern nations. It is quite true that Christendom existed long before any of the nations. But it is also true that those who cling to the nations, however ignorantly, cling to the leavings, and to the living leavings, of the original life; while those who say they are making new things are not making new things, but only making new names. I know exactly what I mean when I say that I am an Englishman and not a Frenchman, though I

ON THE REAL ANIMAL

happen to have an enormous admiration for French culture and tradition. I do not know for certain what other people mean when they say that I am subject to the League of Nations, or am a party to a Pact made up by politicians in a series of Swiss hotels. In the same way, I do not know what other people mean when they say I am descended from Anthropoid Apes or Anglo-Saxons or Aryans, as Mr. Hitler would say. I do not know what they mean in the sense that I know what being an Englishman means.

As I have said, a real religion would be different; because a real religion is a big reality, where a nation is a much smaller reality. I have taken the case of the religion of Mahomet, and it will serve as well as another. Islam is not merely an abstract statement that there is one God, or that the Creed in the Koran is true. Islam is a way of going on. Some people like living the Moslem life; some people loathe it. The same true testimony is borne by the man who says that the Turk is a barbarian, and the other man (who is generally an old woman) who says that the Turk is the only gentleman in Europe. They both mean something; because they both really refer to something. They do not refer to anything that any chance politician may choose to put into a Pact. But, so long as

ON THE REAL ANIMAL

we are not Moslems, and have no other religion in Europe, men will never entirely abandon what is at least relatively real; the traditions of their own fathers and the teeming vitality of the dead.

A NEGATIVE disadvantage attaches to almost any man who has a positive character or, what commonly goes with it and is even more important, positive convictions. A literary man, for instance, who has strong likes and dislikes, in the style of Dr. Johnson or Cobbett or Coventry Patmore, becomes so much of a proverb or a joke that nobody can believe there is anything new to be learnt about him. Anything new that he does say is coloured, or rather discoloured, either by what people know he has said or by what people think he would say. Even what they know they very often know wrong; and when they come to guess, they almost invariably guess wrong. But the still more curious fact is that even when they know they still go on guessing. When the new statement is actually written, it is not actually read. Something else is read into it, which is the recognized rumour about what the eccentric in question is likely to state. For, in truth, most of the critics have not realized anything about the writer except that he is an eccentric, and even in that they are wrong. He has generally earned that reputation by

ON DOGS WITH BAD NAMES

being concentrated on certain fundamental or cosmic convictions. If he is very religious or very irreligious, for instance, he will probably be called eccentric. Obviously he ought to be called centric, since the centre of his mind is rightly fixed on the central problems of existence. But these people called eccentrics, like Johnson or Patmore in one way, or Shelley or Shaw in another way, always suffer from this curious disadvantage—that while people nearly always admit that they are great talkers, people hardly ever listen to what they actually say. People *never* listen to anything they say in correction or reconsideration of anything they have said, or are supposed to have said. What they have said they have said, or what we have said they have said they have said, and there is an end of it. Their position is fixed in the popular mind; and, curiously enough, they generally begin by being very unpopular and end by being very popular. But they are not popular enough to be allowed to point out the meaning of their own words.

Thus I have seen critic after critic throwing out general suggestions and summaries of what Mr. Bernard Shaw would “characteristically” say, which I knew for a fact to be flatly contrary to everything that he was saying. Thus, because he was an Irishman and presumed to be a comic Irishman, and because he often

ON DOGS WITH BAD NAMES

made fun of some aspects of the Englishman, numbers of people have believed he was a sort of Fenian and fierce Irish Nationalist in revolt against the British Empire. Whereas Bernard Shaw not only never pretended for a moment to believe in any sort of Nationalism, but at the political crisis he was rather especially cold towards the nationalism of Ireland. Nay, he definitely preferred, if anything, the Imperialism of England. For instance, he was on the side of the British Empire against the Boers, when all the national Irish were on the side of the Boers against the British Empire. But I suppose that the English people will always cling to the lovely legend of Shaw scorning them and deriding them, though he actually defended them when all Europe denounced them. You could not add that last fact to the popular legend of Bernard Shaw by any possible hook or crook, not if you printed his actual words in letters eight feet high. The public had got its picture of Shaw long before that particular incident, and would continue to believe the legend against the fact; the picture against the face.

I remember being involved in a comic little tangle in which two or three eminent men were treated in this way; I might almost say that they treated each other in this way. Mr. H. G. Wells, in one of his phases, wrote a chapter denouncing the invocation of a

Superman as a sort of separate type of giant or god, like the colossal kings of Egyptian Art. I should have thought there was a touch of this in Mr. Wells himself, in another of his phases, when he described the case for the Giants in *The Food of the Gods*. But I may be wrong; I may myself be falling into this error, which nearly everybody else fell into on this occasion. Anyhow, Mr. Wells not only repudiated the Superman as a solitary king, but accused Mr. Bernard Shaw of having assisted to crown that monstrous monarch. Mr. Shaw had doubtless talked of the Superman sometimes, but he had no difficulty in showing that he had never believed in one Superman ruling all men; but only, like Mr. Wells, in the hope of raising all men to a sort of Supermanhood. But, curiously enough, in the course of this Mr. Shaw had occasion to refer to Mr. Belloc, and said that the theory of the Servile State was only Herbert Spencer's old attack on Socialism. From which it was obvious that Mr. Shaw had never read Mr. Belloc's book on the Servile State, or he would have known that it is not an attack on Socialism, and that it has not the remotest resemblance to Herbert Spencer. But, just as Mr. Wells took it for granted that Mr. Shaw *would* write certain things about the Superman, so Mr. Shaw took it for granted that Mr. Belloc *would* write certain things about the Servile State. And in

ON DOGS WITH BAD NAMES

revenge, as I have said, everybody takes it for granted that Mr. Shaw *would* write certain things about anything or everything. What he did write, or does write, seems to make no difference.

This curious crooked doom, on strong characters with strong convictions, has pursued Mr. Belloc also in later times, in connexion with his historical biographies. I notice some reviews of his book on Napoleon which read to me as if the reviewers had never read his book on Napoleon, but only made a bold guess at what a book on Napoleon by Belloc would be like. Mr. Belloc does not in the least turn Napoleon into a Superman; he even argues that some acknowledged victories were essentially defeats. A still more curious case was that of his book on Cranmer. Everybody knows Mr. Belloc's beliefs on the religion of Cranmer, but they do not appear very much in his book on Cranmer. It is a very swift and simple personal story, that can be read by Protestants or Catholics. What is still more quaint, it is a much more favourable personal story than has generally been written by Protestants. I do not suppose anybody will believe me when I state this fact, because of this interesting preference for a fixed fancy over a fact. But it is fact that the Protestant Macaulay was much more hostile to Cranmer than the Papistical Belloc. In Macaulay's version we feel

ON DOGS WITH BAD NAMES

stark contempt for a dirty little scoundrel; in Belloc's we feel considerable compassion for a timid scholar partly trapped into tricks that were not wholly his own. Yet I have seen scores of reviews which answered the book on Cranmer as if it were a pamphlet challenging all the reformed churches. The truth is simply as I have stated it: when a man has become a public figure famed for certain opinions, any number of critics refuse to criticize anything except those opinions. It is no use for him to have other opinions, or new opinions, even upon new topics. Bernard Shaw must be guying John Bull, though *John Bull's Other Island* is really rather favourable to him; and Belloc must be slandering Cranmer, even when he is almost excusing him.

I HAVE already remarked, with all the restraint that I could command, that of all modern phenomena, the most monstrous and ominous, the most manifestly rotting with disease, the most grimly prophetic of destruction, the most clearly and unmistakably inspired by evil spirits, the most instantly and awfully overshadowed by the wrath of heaven, the most near to madness and moral chaos, the most vivid with devilry and despair, is the practice of having to listen to loud music while eating a meal in a restaurant. It has in it that sort of distraction that is worse than dissipation. For, though we talk lightly of doing this or that to distract the mind, it remains really as well as verbally true that to be distracted is to be distraught. The original Latin word does not mean relaxation; it means being torn asunder as by wild horses. The original Greek word, which corresponds to it, is used in the text which says that Judas burst asunder in the midst. To think of one thing at a time is the best sort of thinking; but it is possible, in a sense, to think of two things at a time, if one of them is really subconscious and there-

ON THE PRISON OF JAZZ

fore really subordinate. But to deal with a second thing which by its very nature thrusts itself more and more aggressively in front of the first thing is to find the very crux of psychological crucifixion. I have generally found that the refined English persons who think it idolatrous to contemplate a religious image, turn up next time full of delighted admiration of some Yogi or Esoteric Hindu who only contemplates his big toe. But at least he contemplates something, and does not have to have ten thousand brazen drums to encourage him to do it. He is so far a real philosopher, in spite of his philosophy. He does not try to do two incompatible things at once.

Some social gestures have been found compatible with social intercourse by that very practical psychology which is as old as the world. Drinking is a help to talking; eating may be indulged in with due moderation and proportion; smoking is also a subconscious and therefore soothing pleasure. But talking to people who are listening to something else which is not the talk is a sort of complex or nexus of futility. To listen to a loud noise which is noisy enough to make speech inaudible, and not noisy enough to make silence conventional, is a strangling cross-purposes of contradiction. Also, as I have often pointed out, it is rude to everybody concerned. It is as if I went to hear Paderew-

ski or Kreisler, at a concert, and started to spread out an elegant supper in front of me, with oysters and pigeon-pie and champagne, coffee and liqueurs. One is an insult to the cook and the other to the musician; but both would be an insult to a companion who had come under the impression that he was to enjoy himself under normal and traditional conditions; of attention during the performance of a concert, or conversation during the progress of a dinner. Sometimes a guest is actually described as being invited to "a quiet dinner." It is rather a quaint phrase when one considers it; as implying that the dinner itself could be noisy; that the soup would roar like the sea, or the asparagus become talkative, or the mutton-chop shriek aloud like the mandrake. But it does bear witness to the normal conception of comfort; that a quiet dinner means a quiet talk. Why, then, should two people walk into the middle of an enormous noise in order to have a quiet talk?

Nevertheless, in contradiction of all my present remarks, in violation of all my principles, I did actually the other day pay some attention to the band that was playing in a restaurant. For one thing, the nightmare of noise, recalling the horns of hell rather than the horns of elfland, is generally accompanied by that undercurrent of battering monotony which I believe is sup-

ON THE PRISON OF JAZZ

posed to be one of the charms of jazz. And, without professing to know much about music, I have formed a very strong impression about jazz. It does express something; and what it expresses is Slavery. That is why the same sort of thrill can be obtained by the throb of savage tom-toms, in music or drama connected with the great slave-land of Africa. Jazz is the very reverse of an expression of liberty, or even an excessive expression of liberty, or even an expression of licence. It is the expression of the pessimist idea that nature never gets beyond nature, that life never rises above life, that man always finds himself back where he was at the beginning, that there is no revolt, no redemption, no escape for the slaves of the earth and of the desires of the earth. There is any amount of pessimistic poetry on that theme that is thrilling enough in its own way; and doubtless the music on that theme can be thrilling also. But it cannot be liberating, or even loosening; it does not escape as a common or vulgar melody can escape. It is the Song of the Treadmill. I had grown sufficiently used to the dull roar of it, in such places, that it did not prevent me from thinking, even if it did prevent me from talking. And then, of a sudden, the musicians began to play the tunes of a particular pre-war period, which was more or less the period of my own early youth. Most of them were quite cheap tunes

ON THE PRISON OF JAZZ

attached to quite silly songs. But they were tunes and they were songs. And therefore they expressed something which has hitherto been the secret of man, and the whole meaning of his position in nature: they expressed Liberty.

For that is exactly the paradox of the transformation that has taken place. The old popular tune was banal, but it was free. Its rhythm was not only repetition. It ran only in order to jump; and its last lap was a great leap that was called a chorus. The swing in it was not the swing of a pendulum, but the swing of a hammer when it is flung finally hurtling from the hand in the old Highland sport. In other words, it escaped; somewhere in the course of it, however crude, however obvious, there was a movement of escape; and the only meaning of jazz is that there is no escape. As it was with the music (save the mark!), so it was with the literature (God help it!). The silly old song was sentimental, but it was also romantic. That is, it believed in itself and its own chances of individual happiness; and happiness has to be taken seriously. But the modern world can only believe in unhappiness, and therefore refuses to take it seriously. But the result is a great loss of the purely lyrical quality and instinct. I do not demand a high place in English letters, or a prominent position in the *Golden Treasury*, for the

ON THE PRISON OF JAZZ

chorus of my youth which ran "Beer, beer, glorious beer, fill yourself right up to here." But I do say that nobody, after consuming any number of cocktails, has yet been inspired to cry aloud anything so spirited and spontaneous and direct. The poetry inspired by cocktails is timid and tortuous and self-conscious and indirect. I do not say that the song beginning "Daisy, Daisy," is one of the supreme achievements of the English muse, but I do say that it is a song that can be sung. And in the age of jazz and cocktails, men either write songs that could not possibly be sung, or leave off writing songs and write fragments of a demented diary instead.

It is the loss of this great Gusto that seems to me the most curious result of the relaxation of Victorian conventions. For we are always told that we were always restricted; that conventions crushed our fathers and mothers and chilled our childhood with respectability. And yet it is certainly true that, if those old songs were bad or banal, they were much more bold and boisterous than anything that has succeeded them. Sometimes I think that our fathers were hard workers and really had holidays. Their holidays were often an orgy of bathos, but they were free. But the modern poet must always be on his best behaviour; I mean, of course, that he must always be on his worst behaviour.

ON THE PRISON OF JAZZ

He must never be seen except in uniform; that is, in the funeral motley of the cynic. He can never become part of a crowd, even for the singing of a chorus. I looked round sadly in my restaurant, full of fashionably dressed people; but none of them attempted to join in the chorus of "Beer, beer, glorious beer." So, as they say in the short stories, I paid my bill and sadly went out into the night.



ONE of the many fallacies in what the newspapers love to call the Appeal to Youth is that Youth, with all its beauties and benefits, is actually more credulous than old age in accepting the appeal of things that are old. Youth will quite naturally accept things that are old, believing them to be new. When the wilder artists and poets of Chelsea and Bloomsbury recently began to wear short side-whiskers in the Spanish manner, it is quite possible that the young ladies of a similar age and set (brought up in an age of the clean-shaven) really regarded it as a wonderful innovation and variant of the natural elemental hairiness of artists and poets; as if the whiskers were wings sprung from the human head to waft it into the superhuman heavens. Anyhow, it may have looked revolutionary, and it certainly did look novel—to anyone young enough to see it so. But to anyone old enough to remember that exactly the same sort of side-whiskers were worn by his own father, when a bank clerk under Queen Victoria, and were known as muttonchop-whiskers, they will seem about as dull, respectable, old-fashioned and

ON THE DECEPTIBILITY OF YOUTH

familiar as mutton-chops. I myself am just old enough to remember seeing such things at least in old family-albums and early photographs. So that the Chelsea artist does not look to me in the least like a Spanish anarchist. He looks like a rather dowdy Victorian stockbroker; as if he had gone to a masquerade ball as his own grandfather. Many an ardent youth may have followed the Futuristic vision of Plus-Fours where his elders could see nothing but a faint ancestral memory of Pegtop-Trousers. The disappearance of beards in the twentieth century would not seem new to a Shavian Methuselah, who remembered them disappearing in the seventeenth century; nor would he hail it as a cosmic daybreak, or salute the happy and hairy morn, even if fashion imitated the beard of D. H. Lawrence, exactly as it might have imitated the beard of Alfred Tennyson. But a very young person, following immediately on the age of D. H. Lawrence, might regard a beard as a bold bad Bolshevik sort of thing. The question of these recurrences and resemblances, or partial resemblances, is almost entirely a question of living long enough; and a woman who lived long enough might find herself, after a century or two of progress, as particular about powdering her nose as she had once been about powdering her hair. In any case, these trivialities reveal the real truth as clearly as do more serious truths. The new

ON THE DECEPTIBILITY OF YOUTH

generation may be admirable in a hundred ways; it may be superior to any number of old generations in any number of ways. There is only one thing which the new generation cannot possibly or conceivably be. It cannot be the best judge of what is new.

I entirely agree that it does not supremely matter whether it is new, so long as it is true. A generation might reproduce unconsciously and almost automatically a whole social system as dead as ancient Egypt or Etruria, imagining it was a brand-new Utopia that even Mr. Wells had never thought of. And it would not very much matter, so long as Etruria really had some of the virtues of Utopia. But it does make a difference in the tone and spirit of the innovator; precisely because we know that Etruria was not Utopia. We might bring back a better state of things out of the past, but no sensible person thinks there was a perfect state of things in the past; though many are strictly and very strangely taught to suppose that there must be one in the future. That is the real difference between the man who knows he is restoring an old thing and the man who thinks he knows that he is inventing a new thing. We may see men wearing three-cornered hats and declaring them to be founded on the new mathematical diagrams; we may see them covering themselves with armour in battle and calling it an en-

ON THE DECEPTIBILITY OF YOUTH

tirely new extension of the Steel Industry; we may see them wearing sandals like the ancient Romans and imagining they are improving on the latest fad of the latest Russians; we may see them wearing nothing but Woad and calling it Nudism and the New Simplicity. But there will always be that amount of difference between these innocent characters and those who may do similar things, but who possess a knowledge of history, which is simply a knowledge of humanity. These latter will always know that even the return of good things will not be the return of perfect things. Sandals may or may not favour simplicity; but they did not turn Nero into a saint or even a vegetarian. The days when knights were bold were days when a reasonable number of knights were bad; and three-cornered hats may be in mathematical shapes, but they rested on a good many unmathematical heads. These are but burlesque instances; but the truth is equally true of symbols and associations that are quite seriously believed. There have been many intelligent and distinguished moderns, who have thought quite gravely that certain great changes in habit or manners, in diet or discipline of life, would make practically all men good and happy. There is only one person who is immune from that illusion. And that is the man who happens to know that nearly every one of these diets and disciplines has

ON THE DECEPTIBILITY OF YOUTH

already existed somewhere; where it did not prevent people from being as naughty or silly as they chose.

The same principle can be seen in practical politics. Many great revolts or reforms, or other social outbreaks, can best be explained by noting the date at which some old experience was no longer even dated, but had gone really and truly out of date. It had become so old that it could easily become new. Thus such revolutions happen, not at the moment when men have found something, but rather at the moment when they have forgotten something. Something has gone out of sight just long enough for people to see it as quite different, if it appears again. Not enough note has been taken in history of these dates of oblivion; as distinct from dates of recognition; for, indeed, they are dates of lack of recognition.

By the time that Europe, especially Northern Europe, threw itself so enthusiastically into national politics, and a complete division of the provinces of Christendom from each other, it had had time to forget what an infernal nuisance it had once been found to live in an anarchy of tribes and towns, all with different gods and incompatible ambitions; as it had been before the Order of the Roman Empire; before politics had been unified by Caesar or religion by Constantine. When men had got far enough away from barbarism

ON THE DECEPTIBILITY OF YOUTH

and blind wars to forget what they were like, they instantly plunged into them again. The moment, of all moments, in which we should be most careful to recall the real dangers and difficulties of any idea, is the moment when it comes back revived, and perhaps rightly revived, after long periods of neglect, and refreshed by the sleep of centuries. I do not say that we should not welcome its revival, or accept its return to triumph; but I do say that it is at exactly that moment that we should remember its demerits, while trying to restore its merits. The danger is that we shall produce some sort of frozen and fanatical copy; for which one generation will be madly enthusiastic, and with which the next generation will probably be bored stiff. The great men of the French Revolution, who were none the less great because many small reactionary schools have tried to belittle them, did undoubtedly fall very heavily into this error. It was so many thousand years since anybody had really inhabited a small and primitive City State, of the early Pagan model, that they dug up their ideal republics like buried temples and worshipped the statues of the Virtues as idols so strange as to be almost new. Because they had at last grown a little tired of Aquinas and Scotus, they never thought how quickly the very schoolboys they taught would grow tired of Cato and Seneca. This warning from the Revo-

ON THE DECEPTIBILITY OF YOUTH

lution is a warning also to the Counter-Revolution; and the Fascists must be careful that we do not grow as weary of the Black Shirt as most of us have of the Red.

THE newspapers have always associated Mr. Winston Churchill with dashing and daring enterprises; and it is not taking sides to say that his experiments in war and politics have been condemned by his foes as imprudent, and praised even by his friends as impetuous. Whatever name be given to the diversions of Gallipoli or Antwerp, there can be no doubt that he has since started out on the bold and steep and even staggering adventure of white-washing the moral character of the original John Churchill. Intellectual courage of that order demands respect and even a sort of sympathy. It is true that we live in an age in which the justification of Judas Iscariot has become quite a hackneyed piece of sentiment for the films. But at least Judas Iscariot was not a soldier. And John Churchill did not hang himself.

The debate that revolves, or will probably revolve, round this book concerns me here rather than the book itself. For the question divides itself into two parts; one of which is doubtless dealt with very ably in the book; and the other is dealt with almost exclu-

ON THE DUKE OF MARLBOROUGH

sively in nearly all the reviews. With the narrower contention of the book, I am not here concerned directly; with the wider contention of the critics, I am very much concerned indeed. The first half of the question is this: was the great Duke of Marlborough really guilty of all, or even most, of the wicked actions attributed to him? I can easily believe that the right answer to this question is: probably not. The second half of the question is this: are his bad actions justified because they were in a good cause, and (incidentally) *were* they in a good cause? For it has been almost entirely on this latter question that the reviewers have spread themselves, in most of the reviews that I have read. Not having read the original documents or details, I am willing to imagine that many of the ugly stories against Churchill can be denied. But I am not inquiring about the stories that are denied, but about the stories that are accepted. And I am inquiring whether those ugly stories do really become pretty stories because they are parts of a pretty story which is still sometimes called Progress, but which was known in my childhood as Little Arthur's History of England. Anybody who thinks can see at once that the logical distinction between these issues is clear. It is one thing to say that we can acquit Churchill of writing certain letters, or living by certain expedients, because the evidence is

ON THE DUKE OF MARLBOROUGH

insufficient to convict him. It is quite another thing to say that we must forgive Churchill for using certain expedients, because his purpose was so noble and public-spirited that his very loftiness of principle obliged him to depend on expediency. In the first case we are trying the man for a crime, and may acquit him. In the second case we are trying the Cause in which the man admittedly committed the crime. If we are to excuse the badness of the crime for the goodness of the cause, we naturally want to know rather more about the cause. And we shall not be altogether contented if at the end (as happens to be my own case) we come honestly to the conclusion that the cause was rather worse than the crime. I have my doubts, to start with, whether such a man is really doing evil that good may come. But it does make a slight difference, if I happen to believe that he is doing evil that evil may come.

For the journalists whom I have found supporting Mr. Churchill's thesis are quite brazen and cynical in maintaining the theory that the end justifies the means. They defend Marlborough's treacherous desertion of James II, wholly and solely upon the ground that it was necessary for the glorious invasion of William III. Without disputing with the journalists a morality which they quite falsely attributed to the Jesuits, we

ON THE DUKE OF MARLBOROUGH

may at least say that in that case we are entitled to inquire exactly how glorious was the invasion of William III? Was William of Orange really so supernatural and beautiful a blessing, such a pearl of great price, such an ideal object of human desire, that a man might practise any degree of deception or desertion, if only he might see in England, like a beatific vision, the face of that divine Dutchman? Was the successful invasion and conquest of England by a Dutch army an object so purely and perfectly patriotic that a great English General was justified in committing mutiny and treason and refusing to lead his own country's army to defend his own country? The fact is that there is no defence of Marlborough in this matter, upon the normal notions about a patriot, a soldier, or a gentleman. The fact can be established by a very simple test. Those who have condemned Marlborough most strongly have been men of normal moral feeling; but men actually inheriting and representing the Whig or Protestant Settlement, for the sake of which he is supposed to have sold his master.

This is what makes it so monstrously amusing that the desperate defence of Marlborough now involves a violent and belated attack on Macaulay. Well, to us who believe in the older English tradition, it is no news that Macaulay talked nonsense. But it seems to be quite

ON THE DUKE OF MARLBOROUGH

forgotten that he talked nonsense entirely on the same side as the apologists of Marlborough. He might well have thought that nothing could be too good or bad to glorify the Glorious Revolution. He was probably the only sane human being who ever lived who really did regard William of Orange as an ideal object and a pearl of great price. If Marlborough had really been only a hero of the Glorious Revolution, I cannot imagine what motive Macaulay could have had for describing him as anything but heroic. Mr. Churchill seems to suggest that Macaulay got all his bias against Marlborough by meekly and credulously swallowing everything to be found in Jacobite pamphlets. A rather extraordinary suggestion to anybody who happens to have read Macaulay, and remembers how he speaks about those very same Jacobite pamphlets. He blackens them as baseless slanders against William of Orange; why should he not have equally disregarded their slanders against Marlborough? Marlborough was everything that Macaulay admired: a great Whig, a great maker of the Revolution, a very great English soldier; and Macaulay's patriotism was not small. It seems to me staringly self-evident that Macaulay is rather a reluctant witness, if anything, against the great warrior of the Whigs. But Macaulay also had a moral sense; an old Victorian piece of furniture which is now not much in

ON THE DUKE OF MARLBOROUGH

fashion. Anyhow, I confess there is at least one other authority who counts with me much more than Macaulay. He is even more of an example of an independent witness testifying, if anything, against his own side. If we allow anyone to criticize the Duke of Marlborough, it might well be the Duke of Wellington. Nobody says Wellington was a romantic Jacobite or a sentimental Fenian regretting the victory of the Boyne. But Wellington did regret the treason of Marlborough; and regret is a very mild term. He said he could not conceive any soldier doing such a thing; and his word will not be easy to erase.

But the question still remains—if treason was done that truth might triumph, was it really the truth that triumphed? Was Truth the outstanding quality of that long agitation against the last Stuarts which began with the statements of the Rev. Titus Oates and ended with the Story of the Warming-Pan? Was truth, or even justice, or, for that matter, even liberty, particularly characteristic of the system and the dynasty which the Revolution substituted for the Stuarts: the progress whose practical stages in history bear the names of Glencoe and Limerick and Wood's Halfpence and the South Sea Bubble? I never could see, for the life of me, that there was any particular improvement of any kind, in the matter of freedom and enlightenment, merely

ON THE DUKE OF MARLBOROUGH

following on the usurpation by William of Orange. The last Stuarts were much more in favour of freedom and enlightenment; of religious toleration; of international peace; of culture and comprehension of the arts. I admit that a new sort of freedom and enlightenment, for good or evil, came long afterwards from the French Revolution. But there is not a scrap of logical link between the French Revolution and the Glorious Revolution. The latter, as Macaulay truly said, was glorious only for William of Orange; and its spirit now remains only in a few Orangemen. With all respect to them, they do not exactly represent the widest philosophy of modern times.

WE should naturally think that vulgarity and eccentricity were at opposite extremes; that whatever the vulgarian might do, he would scorn doing anything eccentric; and that whatever the eccentric might do, he would scorn doing anything vulgar. When of the energetic Mr. Bundleton-Brown, who has just bought the shooting from the impecunious Duke, it is first faintly whispered that he is "rather common," it is certainly meant that there are rather too many of him; even by those who know only a few, and wish there were fewer still. But when of Mr. Gurley Wow, the enthusiast who, so far from shooting birds, stands still for days that they may comfortably nest in his hair, when of him it is said that he is "rather eccentric," it serves at least to clear his reputation of the charge of commonness, of dull conventionality, of snobbish acceptance of a uniform suburban etiquette, and all such things. By being a lunatic, he has at least purged himself of the foul stain of being a regular guy. And we should naturally suppose that the regular guy would be equally satisfied with the thought that he was not a lunatic. And yet

ON THE CRANK AND THE CAD

these two extremes do in fact meet.

They meet in the modern thing called journalism, or the Press, and the cause of the conjunction of contrarieness is curious and amusing. It arises out of the combination of two different things: the newspaper looking for customers and the newspaper looking for copy. For the purpose of circulation, it is all to the interest of the newspaper that Mr. Bundleton-Brown should be very common indeed. That is, that there should be a great many of him, and that they should be all approximately alike; that they should all have the same social habits, including the habit of reading the newspaper. It is desirable that they should be regular in their habits, and even in their virtues; as, for example, that Mr. Bundleton-Brown should pay for the newspaper, and not think it funny to snatch it off the newspaper stall and rush in triumph down the street, leaping like a young goat and emitting shrill cries of joy. Mr. Bundleton-Brown is expected to show business enterprise, but not to be enterprising in any direct romantic fashion like that. If he shows enough business enterprise, of the sort that is entirely unromantic, he may at last be rewarded by buying wholesale instead of retail. He who once stopped humbly to "buy a newspaper," with no intention save that of being a newspaper-reader, may some day "buy a newspaper," just as he

ON THE CRANK AND THE CAD

buys the shooting, in the sense of becoming a newspaper proprietor. In that position he may discover that there is, after all, another side to the newspaper. It is not enough that an endless procession of Bundleton-Browns should pass perpetually in front of the news-stall, as they pass through the booking-office or by the ticket collector. There are other and more threatening necessities. There are other dark and menacing problems which, neglected perhaps hitherto, and lightly tossed aside in the first conception of a great capitalist design, nevertheless return and crowd upon the mind in the supreme hour of successful purchase and ownership.

After all, he must put something in the paper. However well trained and well behaved be the Bundleton-Browns as a class, however smoothly they are accustomed to performing the same social functions every day, however automatic it has become for them to buy a paper just as they eat a breakfast or catch a train—still, even in them there would be a faint stir, as of half-awakened minds moving about in worlds not realized, if they opened the daily paper and found nothing but completely blank pages. It is not too much to say that they would vaguely miss something; something, they knew not what, that had been part of what the biologists would call their lives. Now when it comes to filling up the pages of a paper, the news about the eccentric

ON THE CRANK AND THE CAD

is much better than the news about the regular guy. The man who has birds' nests in his hair is a much better feature for a sheet meant to produce a certain shallow distraction of mind than the worthy patron of the paper who begins shooting at the right season, or reads the newspaper at the right hour. Mr. Bundleton-Brown may live entirely by the commandment to do whatever is done by Mr. Jumbleton-Jones. But he does not want to read about Mr. Jumbleton-Jones, and how he does everything that is done by Mr. Bundleton-Brown. If he must read, since he can read, since he is a free modern citizen and has been compulsorily taught to read, he would rather read about something a little odd or out of the way. Thus does Mr. Gurley Wow, his eccentric rival, come back into his kingdom; his wild kingdom of the birds. He and his birds, and the wild hair and whiskers to which they cling, may fill a whole illustrated page in a paper, while there is only a curt sentence in the fashionable news to show that Mr. Bundleton-Brown has bought the shooting from the Duke. Thus, the paper tends more and more to be a record of rare and unrepresentative things, or even of cracked and crazy things. But it is written about extraordinary people, because it is written for ordinary people. It is no guide to the opinion of the public on any serious matter; it is at the most a guide to the newspaper pro-

ON THE CRANK AND THE CAD

prietor's opinion; or to his desire to conceal the fact that he has not got an opinion; or to his equally solid conviction (more sincere and, in some cases, even possibly true) that the public has not got an opinion either. It is merely a witness to the fact that mankind wants to be amused and that mankind is still amused, as much as ever it was, with dwarfs and giants, bearded women, and twelve-toed men.

To a certain extent this was equally true of the records of the remote past; and a well-equipped modern newspaper is not much behind a barbaric chronicle or saga of the Dark Ages. They also delighted to record that a child had been born with the head of an elephant, as we to record that a prize Eugenic child is destined to grow up as a Superman. They rejoiced to tell tales of some remote Turkish Sultan who had cut off the noses of all his subjects, just as our newspapers seriously record proposals for general mutilation in the name of morality and science. But there is one little difficulty about it: that, in the ages of faith, the story-tellers were not moralists. They recorded the acts of mad kings or dubious magicians, but they never said they approved of them any more than the manager of a travelling show expresses a moral conviction that all women ought to have beards. The curiosities were exhibited because they were curious. There was never a panic spread in the

ON THE CRANK AND THE CAD

fair to the effect that the curiosity was contagious. It was never the fashion for women to grow hair on their faces, as it can be the fashion for them to shave it off their heads. The gentleman with twelve toes was not treated as a Superman, whose feet were more beautiful upon the mountains than those of other bearers of good news; he was not regarded as a new and promising evolutionary growth or expanding organism. The curse of the present conjunction between the commonplace spirit in the public and the eccentric nature of the news and notions offered them in the newspaper is that the wildest things are suggested with a savour of serious prophecy; and, above all, that the wildest things are preached to the tamest people. And they are so accustomed to taking what is given them, and so unaccustomed to tasting what is good, that there is a real danger of such nonsense acting like a stimulant on an empty stomach. There is so much that is nonsensical in the daily news-sheet, and so little that is new in the daily life, that there may be a dangerous breach between the unreal and the real. It is not the most commonly discussed of the problems of the Press; but it is one of the most vital, or deadly.

THE subject of Dreams has always been admittedly allied to mysticism, and not far from superstition. The interpretation of dreams was a well-known function of many ancient prophets, and only gradually died away under what was considered the march of enlightenment. Unfortunately, in this as in many things, the march of enlightenment proceeded to march very straight into all the ancient darkness and mystery. The man who talked about his dreams, who had become rather a bore at breakfast, suddenly found that he had the opportunity of being a broader, brainier, and more universal and philosophical bore in the lecture-room or on the platform of scientific and religious debate. Psycho-analysis resurrected the archaic interpreter of dreams, just as Psychical Research resurrected the ancient necromancer or professional raiser of ghosts. We often read about the modern world as mocking the superstitions of the past, even of the immediate past; but almost the exact opposite is the truth. A number of things are taken seriously now that would only have been mocked a hundred years ago; or, in some cases, even two hun-

ON DREAMS

dred years ago. Voltaire would not believe the scientists even when they found the fossil of a fish; we can only imagine what he would have said if a scientist like Sir Oliver Lodge had offered to introduce him to the phantom of a man. The whole modern movement, from Hume to Huxley, was supposed to have awakened men out of every sort of dream, and even classed their spiritual visions and revelations with their dreams. I know not what the men of that movement would have thought if they had found a more modern generation actually believing in visions and revelations merely because they had been communicated in dreams.

Yet this is the general impression produced by a Symposium on Dreams, and containing contributions by many brilliant and distinguished men, especially of the most modern sort. They do not, indeed, state their credulity in the form of a creed; but a great deal of modern liberality merely consists of leaving out the creed and keeping the credulity. The things that some of them say, both in this symposium and elsewhere, are very arresting and extraordinary. Mr. Algernon Blackwood, indeed, is an acknowledged and even authoritative student of mysticism; and, perhaps for that very reason, his story is the most moderate and his comments the most cautious. He definitely attests to a case of a thing which he had lost, he knew not where, and

ON DREAMS

how its exact hiding-place was revealed to him in a dream and afterwards verified as a fact. But he takes it lightly and almost humorously, as is the way of experienced mystics, and is willing to refer it to some ordinary operation of the subconsciousness. But Miss Storm Jameson records a case in which she was completely puzzled by a practical problem in daily life, from which she thought she had explored every possible avenue of escape; after which she dreamed an apparently irrelevant, but beautiful and consoling dream, full of strange gardens and wonderful white flowers, to awaken in the morning with an entirely new and quite practical expedient blazing clearly in her mind. She does not seem to have the least doubt that it was the one and only right solution, and that some unknown beneficence had revealed it to her in her sleep. I am not attempting to value these experiences in relation to any theory: I am merely remarking the way in which the most modern people can accept the direction of dreams, and treat such a mystical thing entirely as a practical thing.

The most remarkable statement is that of Mr. C. R. W. Nevinson, the vigorous artist and critic. He begins with a rigid denial of all belief in the supernatural, and especially in a life after death. I do not quite understand what he means by saying: "Having been near death more often than many mortals, I have reason

to believe it is one long eternal sleep." I do not see what having been near death can possibly have to do with it, one way or the other. There is no parallel to the difference between death and life; but even touching the differences of living men, the argument would be a fallacy. There may be many a millionaire who, on looking back at his most brilliant financial triumphs and expedients, may be conscious that on several occasions he was very near to Dartmoor. But I should not agree that the millionaire, reflecting comfortably at the Carlton, was necessarily an authority on the plan and inside arrangements of Dartmoor, or qualified to advise convicts on how to escape from Dartmoor. And, as I say, there is no comparison between the secrets of Dartmoor and the secrets of death. I think he would see the fallacy at once, if it were used on the other side; if an Army chaplain were to say that he now knew all about Purgatory and Paradise because a shell missed him by an inch or the doctors despaired of him in hospital. But his preliminary statement of complete scepticism is none the less valuable in relation to what follows. Even more valuable is his realization of a historical fact that is very rarely realized. "My main sympathy with Christianity is that originally it cleared the dark minds of Greece and Rome of omens, portents, and all the terrors of superstition."

ON DREAMS

Then he goes on to state, in the most calm and lucid and interesting manner, that a number of his own pictures were quite certainly prophetic, and that this prophetic power had generally come to him in dreams. He even says that he has painted and exhibited pictures which he himself dislikes; in obedience to the direction of dreams, and because he finds they have some super-human and supernormal quality, to attract or repel, which can only come out of the power which directs his dreams. This, it will be noted, really goes a good way beyond what has been heard from the mystics who are regarded as most mystical, or even regarded as most mad. William Blake drew images from what would be called invisible models, but he never said he disliked drawing them or that he disliked the drawings when they were done. He wrote and published poems of which he said that "the authors are in Eternity," but he never felt as if the authors were bad authors, or the poems bad poems. I use the word "bad," in this case, of course, in the merely popular sense of not pleasing the normal taste, not merely of the public, but even of the poet or the painter. The state of things described by this stern sceptic is, in fact, very much more extraordinary than any state of things that has generally been described by religious enthusiasts or ecstatic believers. He, much more than they, may be described as believ-

ON DREAMS

ing without understanding; or, perhaps, as obeying without believing. He is driven, indeed, to what is perhaps only a verbal inconsistency, for he begins by announcing that he definitely disbelieves in the supernatural, and ends by saying that he believes in something "which is either subconscious or supernatural"; passing from the negative at least to the agnostic view. But I fully realize that words must be hard to manage in describing so strange and even extreme a state of transcendentalism. Certainly, nobody could say it is a state of dull and stolid materialism. There seems to me, if anything, rather more danger that a man obeying the voice of a nameless destiny, which speaks only in dreams, may also need to be delivered, like the Greeks and Romans, from "omens, portents, and all the terrors of superstition."

IN dealing with such things as Prohibition, I have sometimes had occasion to mention Puritanism. Disputes have arisen about this word, and about how far it is fair to associate it at least with a mild shade of pessimism. Sporadic attempts are made to modify this strong popular impression; and I saw an article the other day which largely turned upon a statement that Calvin was allowed to play with darts. As I have not the least desire to be unfair to Puritans, I think I should like to sum up what seems to me the substantial historical truth of the matter; and the real point of the whole story. So far as I am concerned, the point is not so much against Calvin as against Calvinism; and not so much even against Calvinism as against that much less logical Modernism, which has taught everybody in our time that religious error does not matter. It matters very much in two ways; and Puritanism is a striking historical example of both. First, something that might well seem to sensible people to be only a fine shade of thought, merely theoretical and theological, does in fact change the mind. It produces a mood which does darken the

ON THE FOSSIL OF A FANATIC

world; or some particular part of the world. About the degree of the darkness or the density of the cloud, we may well differ; but it is a matter of common sense to see where the cloud did or does rest. Nobody will dare to maintain that the Scottish Sabbath has not in fact been more strict than the English Sunday, let alone the Continental Sunday. Everyone knows that it was the Puritans who objected to Archbishop Laud's famous publication on the subject; everyone knows that they objected to his Book of Sports because it was a book of sports; everyone knows that they thought the sports too sportive. Attempts to explain away solid outstanding historical facts of this kind are altogether fanciful. But it does not follow that every founder of every sect involved attached supreme importance to this particular point; some of them did; some of them did not. The whole movement grew gradually from various roots, but this is what it grew to be. A man alive in the middle of the Renaissance, speculating about a system of Presbyters which he had not yet begun to found, amid a thousand others speculating about a thousand other things, would not, of course, become instantly identical with a Presbyterian minister of modern times. He would not begin on the spot to grow the black top hat and bushy whiskers of a Scottish elder or precentor in one of Sir James Barrie's plays or stories. *Nemo repente*

ON THE FOSSIL OF A FANATIC

fit turpissimus. Which it would doubtless be very unfair to translate as "No one suddenly becomes a precursor."

But there is another historical process involved. It is much more curious; and it has been much more curiously neglected. One special form of the harm done by the extreme sects in the seventeenth century was this: that they really died young, and that what has infected our culture since has not been their life, or even their death, but rather their decay. In most cases the Puritans lost their religion and retained their morality; a deplorable state of things for anybody. If the special narrow theologies had not perished rapidly as they did, the atmospheric moral mood would not have lingered on exactly in the way it did. But, above all, it permitted of a process which seems to me one of the strangest and most interesting in human history; but which does not seem as yet to have been noticed by historians. It is rather like the geological process of the formation of a fossil. Everyone knows that a fossil fish is not a fish; nor a fossil bird a bird. I do not mean merely in the obvious sense: that we should be surprised, nay annoyed, in a restaurant, if we asked for a fish and they gave us a stone. I mean that a fossil is a form, in which remains no actual fragment of a fish. It is a hollow mould or image of a fish, which is very

ON THE FOSSIL OF A FANATIC

gradually filled up by the infiltration of something else, after the actual fish has decayed. Thus we find the general outline of these stony and very literal faiths filled up by something else when the old fanaticism has decayed. There are two great modern examples of that creepy and uncanny historical transmutation. One is what we call Prohibition and the other is what we call Prussianism.

The point is perhaps clearest in the case of Prohibition. The old original Puritans were not Prohibitionists. Oliver Cromwell was a brewer; but he was not inspired or intoxicated by beer, nor (like the teetotallers) inspired and intoxicated by the absence of beer. Whatever his faults, he did most certainly have a real religion, in the sense of a creed. But it was a sombre creed, one which had been made intentionally more stern and ruthless than the other creeds; and this created a new mood and moral atmosphere, which ultimately spread all over the great plains of Puritan America. Now the point is this: that as the creed crumbled slowly as a creed, its place was taken by something vaguer but of the same general spirit. The severe theological credo was replaced by a severe social veto. You can put it another way if you like, and say that America tolerated Prohibition, not because America was Puritan, but because America had been Puritan. The idea of morality

ON THE FOSSIL OF A FANATIC

that came to prevail till lately at least, was in every sense a survival of Puritanism, even if it was also in a sense a substitute for Puritanism. That is the essential history of that curious episode; the teetotal ethic of modern times. Prohibition was not a part of the origin of Puritanism; none the less, Prohibition was a thing of Puritan origin.

The same is true of the religious fanaticism that filled Germany in the Thirty Years' War; as compared with the national or tribal fanaticism that now fills Germany after the Great War. The old fanatics who followed Gustavus Adolphus and William of Orange were not ethnologists or evolutionists. They did not imagine that they belonged to a Nordic race; they most certainly did not imagine that they or theirs had ever been bothered with a swastika. They saluted the cross or they smashed the cross, but it had not occurred to them to tap the four ends of it so as to turn it into a fragment of Chinese or Red Indian decoration. They were thinking about their own strictly religious scruples and schisms. They were really fighting fiercely and savagely for points of doctrine; and I should be the last to blame them for it. But those doctrines did not last; they were the very doctrines that have now long been dissolving in the acids of German scepticism; in the laboratories of the Prussian professors. And the more

ON THE FOSSIL OF A FANATIC

they evaporated and left a void, the more the void was filled up with new and boiling elements; with tribalism, with militarism, with imperialism and (in short) with that very narrow type of patriotism that we call Prussianism.

Most of us would agree that this kind of patriotism is a considerable peril to every other kind of patriotism. That is the whole evil of the ethnological type of loyalty. Settled States can respect themselves, and also respect each other; because they can claim the right to defend their own frontiers and yet not deny their duty to recognize other people's frontiers. But the racial spirit is a restless spirit; it does not go by frontiers but by the wandering of the blood. It is not so much as if France were at war with Spain; but rather as if the Gipsies were more or less at war with everybody. You can have a League of Nations; but you could hardly have a League of Tribes. When the Tribe is on the march, it is apt to forget leagues—not to mention frontiers. But my immediate interest in this flood of tribalism is that it has since poured into the empty hollows left by the slow drying up of the great Deluge of the Thirty Years' War, and that all this new and naked nationalism has come to many modern men as a substitute for their dead religion.

THE new book on Blake by Mr. Middleton Murry is one with so many aspects and attractive suggestions that I do not apologize for dealing with it here; though I have dealt with it elsewhere, under conditions of unavoidable brevity. As Mr. Middleton Murry is much interested in the present and the future, his book might well be called, in Blake's own phrase, a Prophetic Book. This does not mean that I necessarily believe in the prophecies of Mr. Murry; or, for that matter, in the prophecies of Blake. But it does mean that we have to deal with mystical ideas which are, in the right sense, modern ideas. It must always be difficult to analyse the doubtful or double sense in which Blake used certain religious terms. But there is no doubt that Blake did say that his books were inspired books. And there is no doubt that some of us would be content to say that they are inspiring books.

In this larger sense, if in a lesser degree, this book on Blake is an inspiring book; but especially in the sense of being a challenging book; and occasionally an annoying book. It is written with sincerity, and even a sort

ON BLAKE AND HIS CRITICS

of simplicity; and the most curious thing about it is the direct way in which the author assumes that he has to deal with the Prophetic Books; almost as if Blake had never written any other books. He admits that the Prophetic Books are "difficult" as compared with the other books. What he does not seem to me to admit sufficiently, or at least to emphasize sufficiently, is the ordinary fact, of criticism or literature, that, as compared with the other books, the Prophetic Books are tolerably bad books. It is not merely that they are difficult to understand. There are turns and sequences in Blake's strongest lyrics that are decidedly difficult to understand. But the ordinary cultivated critic does know that the lyric is strong; whereas he might be tempted to think that the Prophetic Book is weak. The one is a real rush of words, like the flowering of a tree, or the flight of a flock of wild geese or swallows. The other, when all is allowed, does often seem to be a wilderness of words. In fact, the finest imaginative work of Blake may be found in some of those compressed couplets, almost crushed together in their creative pressure. Nobody who really understands Imagination, or how near it seems to Inspiration, would hesitate to give pages of the rambling epics about Albion and Urizen, for four lines like these, which I quote from memory and probably wrong:

ON BLAKE AND HIS CRITICS

As the chimney-sweeper's sigh
Every blackened church appals;
Or the slaughtered soldier's cry
Runs in blood down palace walls.

Those are two lightning-flashes revealing two separate Visions of Judgment. Notice the earthquake ellipsis, by which the soot of the chimney-sweep is transferred to the church; as if it were blasted and blackened by the black hands of a giant. And note that the second picture is a burning transparency of some portent upon Potsdam or Versailles, as memorable as the Feast of Belshazzar. It seems to me that, after all, Blake was most striking in these blinding strokes. It may be worth while to find out what he meant in the epic about America, which was not about America; or the great work about Milton, which had next to nothing to do with Milton. But we do not need to ask what he meant by the blackened church or the blood on the palace wall.

He meant exactly what he said: and he said exactly what he meant; and there is here perhaps a difference of literary test. For I am one of those who think that the poet stands separate and supreme among men, in that simple fact that the poet can say exactly what he means, and that most men cannot. I think, in other words, that the other name of Poet is Pontifex; or the

ON BLAKE AND HIS CRITICS

Builder of the Bridge. And if there is not a real bridge between his brain and ours, it is useless to argue about whether it has broken down at our end or at his. He has not got the communication. It seems to me that Blake did get the communication in his Poetical Books, and did not get it in his Prophetic Books. I will take another example, also from memory. Mr. Middleton Murry describes with great insight and sympathy how Blake, though recoiling from most contemporary religion, in the sense of theology, yet recoiled with equal violence from the Rationalism of the Deists and all that is now called Scientific Education. This, Mr. Murry explains to us, is described in one of the Prophetic Books in a passage in which, after various vast and unrecognizable giants have seized and grasped various things, one of them grasps the book; and his name is apparently Newton; not a common name among giants. This does undoubtedly mean what Mr. W. B. Yeats (a very acute and sensitive student of Blake) himself expressed with more wit and lucidity in one of his plays: "I tell you that Sin and Death came into the world when Newton ate the apple.—Oh, I know he only saw it falling, but the principle is the same." Blake did most heartily believe that the new scientific scepticism was utterly hollow and hopeless. Whether he was right or not will still be disputed; which means that

ON BLAKE AND HIS CRITICS

there are still any number of disputants on Blake's side. But the point is that the reference in the Prophetical Book is cloudy and confusing; even the *image* is cloudy and confusing. Here are four lines that Blake wrote to exactly the same effect, when his style was really effective:

Mock on, mock on, Voltaire, Rousseau,
Mock on, mock on; 'tis all in vain:
You throw the sand against the wind
And the wind blows it back again.

That is Poetry; that is a clear and direct image which does convey perfectly what is meant; the futility of the fight of what is dull and heavy against what is full of light and living energy. It is, in fact, a full and even final example of the Image; and, therefore, of the function of Imagination.

Now the curious thing is that Mr. Middleton Murry begins his own book with a most beautiful and illuminating passage about this point of Imagination and the Image. He is describing the indescribable, and he very nearly does it. He does suggest that real imagination gives to an object a sort of ecstatic separation and sanctity; a greater reality than that of what we call the real world. It puzzles me a little that a man who sees this so clearly does not see it more clearly in the real

ON BLAKE AND HIS CRITICS

poems of Blake than in the laborious metaphysical notebooks of Blake. For he does not disguise the intellectual disadvantages of the latter. He admits that the Prophet Blake was sometimes not only bewildering, but also bewildered. He has a theory that the whole continuity of the Prophetic Books broke down over the prophet having a quarrel with his wife; or rather, in a sense (oddly enough), broke down on his having a partial reconciliation with his wife. In short, it broke down over the prophet discovering that he was not only a prophet, but also a man, and a miserable sinner. The truth is, I take it, that Blake was like other men and miserable sinners in certain respects; including that of starting out in youth with simple and sweeping generalizations; which he thought obviously true, because they are obviously simple. It takes other men besides prophets some little time to discover that man and marriage and other realities are not obviously simple. It is easy to start out crying, with the voice of a trumpet: "Man has no body apart from his soul." But is the man quite certain that he knows what he means? Or if he does know, is it as true as he thinks it is? In a sense more practical than Blake meant, he did indeed pass from Songs of Innocence to Songs of Experience. But even on Mr. Middleton Murry's own showing, it does

ON BLAKE AND HIS CRITICS

seem to me that a good many of the Prophetic Books were really Songs of Innocence. And I confess that I prefer the Songs of Innocence when they were really songs.

THE foreign news which comes to us by the newest and most scientific methods of communication is much more confusing than it was when it was mere gossip. Good communications corrupt good manners. At any rate, they corrupt good methods; and certainly they corrupt good messages. The different statements, for instance, that have been made about the policy of Hitler might almost lead the superstitious to suppose that there are two Hitlers; as some legend once suggested that there were two Neros. Without deciding between the contrasted conceptions, or going at the moment into the question of the value of either of them, it may be worth remarking that one contradiction of this kind has been concerned with this pivotal problem of The Family. On the one side, it would really seem that the German Dictator is concerned to restore the sane and solid status of The Family. He has insisted, though sometimes in rather florid and foolish language, that a woman may fulfil herself rightly in the personal relation; and that she does not find her only freedom in the financial or official relation. He has said a word for large families;

ON THE INSTABILITY OF THE STATE

and for the resumption of the patriarchal dignity that has figured with such distinction from the beginning of history. At the same time, we see statements in the newspapers about schemes for supporting all the fads that have recently attacked the family. We read of all the stale theories of Eugenics; the talk of compulsory action to keep the breed in a certain state of bestial excellence; of nosing out every secret of sex or origin, so that nobody may survive who is not Nordic; of setting a hundred quack doctors to preserve an imaginary race in its imaginary purity. Now Eugenics of that sort is, always has been, and always must be, merely a violent assault on The Family. It is, by definition, the taking away from The Family of the decisions that ought to belong to The Family. When those decisions are made in the domestic and individual way, in which they should be made, nobody in his senses ever dreams of describing the decision as Eugenics. The private persons involved do not call the issue of their own private affairs Eugenics; they call it love, or childbirth, or childlessness, or whatever they choose. The whole point of these pseudo-scientific theories always was that they were to be applied wholesale, by some more sweeping and generalizing power than the individual husband or wife or household. The way in which the newspaper reports refer to them, in the case of the New Germany, is not

ON THE INSTABILITY OF THE STATE

reassuring. But then, on the other hand, the newspaper reports may be lies. Or again, the other and contrary newspaper reports may be lies. I shall here go no further than recording that they cannot both of them be true.

But there is one point about this particular problem of The Family which connects itself, in another way, with the present revolutions and counter-revolutions of Europe. There are certain sayings which for the last hundred years or so have not been considered quite respectable, because they were religious; or perhaps connected with the sort of religion that was not quite respectable. One of those statements is this: "The Family comes first; it comes before the State; its authority and necessity are anterior to those of the State." This always sounded perfectly horrid to rows and rows of earnest young people, learning statistics for Fabian Socialism at the London School of Economics. To that type, to that generation, the State was everything; that great official machine, which managed the traffic and took over the telephone system, was the very cosmos in which these people lived. For them, The Family was a stuffy thing somewhere in the suburbs which only existed to be the subject of Problem Plays and Problem Novels. The only question about it was whether its gloom should be brightened up by suicide; or its self-

ON THE INSTABILITY OF THE STATE

ishness exalted by self-indulgence. But the whole of this view, though it is a view very nearly universal in the big modern towns, only exists because the big modern town is an entirely artificial society. Those inside it know no more about the normal life of humanity than the equally select society inside Colney Hatch or inside Portland Gaol. In some ways a lunatic asylum or a convict settlement are much better organized, are certainly much more elaborately organized, than the hugger-mugger of human beings doing as they like outside. But it is the human beings outside who are human; and it is their life that is the life of humanity.

Now the sweeping social revolutions that have swept backwards and forwards across Europe of late, the stroke of the Bolsheviks, the counter-stroke of the Fascists, the imitation of it in Hitlerite Germany, the recovery of the secret societies in Spain, the new creation in Ireland, all these great governmental changes may serve to bring men's minds back to that big fundamental fact which the big cities have fancied to be a paradox. The big cities had this notion for a perfectly simple reason: that in the modern moment in which they lived, and especially in an industrial country like ours, the framework of the State did really look stronger than the framework of The Family. The modern industrial mob was accustomed to the endless and tragic

ON THE INSTABILITY OF THE STATE

trail of broken families; of tenants failing to pay their rents; of slums being condemned and their inhabitants scattered; of husband or wife wandering in search of work or swept apart by separation or divorce. In those conditions, The Family seemed the frailest thing in the world; and the State the strongest thing in the world. But it is not really so. It is not so, when we take the life of a man over large areas of time or space. It is not so, when we pass from the static nineteenth century to the staggering twentieth century. It is not so when we pass out of peaceful England to riotous Germany or gun-governed America. Over all the world tremendous transformations are passing over the State, so that a man may go to bed in one State and get up in another. The very name of his nation, the very nature of his common law, the very definition of his citizenship, the uniform and meaning of the policeman at the corner of his street, may be totally transformed tomorrow, as in a fairy-tale. He cannot really refer the daily domestic problems of his life to a State that may be turned upside-down every twenty-four hours. He must, in fact, fall back on that primal and prehistoric institution; the fact that he has a mate and they have a child; and the three must get on together somehow, under whatever law or lawlessness they are supposed to be living.

ON THE INSTABILITY OF THE STATE

Take a very influential and creative culture in which the family has always been fundamental; take China. Is there any earthly sense, at this moment, in telling a Chinaman that he must cease to belong to The Family, and be content to belong to the State? He may not unnaturally ask, "What State?" The Japanese armies may advance today, over the land occupied by one of five rival Chinese generals yesterday. Tomorrow, both of them may have disappeared from practical politics; a national reaction may have restored the Son of Heaven to his sacred palace in Pekin; or the Russian Communists may have swept across China and plotted it out under Commissars, that "the State" may start another Five-year Plan. It is simply not possible for men to regard these vast tempestuous changes, in what the Chinese might call the Upper Air, as having the same real relation to themselves as the mother that bore them, or the child that is born to them. In the break-up of the modern world, The Family will stand out stark and strong as it did before the beginning of history; the only thing that can really remain a loyalty, because it is also a liberty.



MANY have seen, and many more must have heard of, the very amusing performance which was given at the Ambassadors Theatre. "*The Streets of London*," based on the idea of acting a melodrama as a burlesque. It is true that the old melodrama of Dion Boucicault is not turned into an extravagant burlesque; nor indeed, compared with some, was it ever a very extravagant melodrama. It is almost entirely a matter of certain stage conventions which look very stiff to our generation; which always looked rather stagey even to the earlier generation, only that the earlier generation really rather liked the stage to be stagey. It is always necessary to remember, and it is very easy to forget, this last little point about the changes in human taste. A young man of the time and type of Shelley, let us say, wearing a loose collar and neckcloth and long flowing hair, certainly regarded his grandfather as a very artificial old dandy if he was patched and powdered and buttoned up with innumerable buttons in the frills and furbelows of the eighteenth century. The young man thought his own costume was more natural, and the old man

ON A MELODRAMA

thought the young man's costume was stark mad. But the old man did not think his own costume was natural. He thought it was the business of any gentleman's costume to be artificial. He did not pretend that his hair was naturally white with powder or grew in a pigtail, or that frills were sprouting on him like feathers on a chicken, or that high red heels had grown out of his feet. He simply was not competing with the young man at all, in the matter of naturalness. He belonged to an age when people thought that dress ought to be dressy.

Dion Boucicault belonged to an age when people thought that the stage ought to be stagey. I admit that the eighteenth century was in many ways much more intelligent than the nineteenth century. Therefore, an artificial comedy like *The School for Scandal* is not so easily made absurd as an artificial melodrama like *The Streets of London*. But *The School for Scandal* is artificial, and in some minor matters even absurd; that is, unintentionally absurd. There are always some stage properties of a period that look a little too stagey at a subsequent period. Nevertheless, when all this is allowed for, it must be admitted that the period of Victorian melodrama was a pretty ghastly period. The admirable setting and acting of *The Streets of London* brings out all that was most pompous and preposterous,

ON A MELODRAMATIC

with a dexterity all the better for not being overdone. I appreciated especially the remarkable feat of writing a letter on the stage, as I have seen it done in all seriousness in my boyhood; when the squire conveys to his lawyer that his estate is to be divided between six different sons in six totally different ways, with a curse or blessing attached to each, and does it all with one long scratching line, followed by a thunderous thump to represent the seal or stamp. It was also very pleasing to see the hero wandering about with a chair in his hand, which he offered to the mendicant from the streets, and pushed backwards or forwards according to whether the mendicant was or was not included in the conversation—if it can be called conversation. For some of it, of course, was soliloquy; and every now and then I drew in, with a deep breath of appreciation, the intensity of a hissing aside.

And yet, though nobody could see it without laughing, there are things to be thought about as well as things to be laughed at. To recur to the case of the Byronic young man and his frilled and powdered grandfather, there is one obvious moral to be drawn. The Byronic young man knew that his grandfather's dress had been more artificial, but there was one thing that the Byronic young man certainly did not know. He did not know that his own dress, the dress he considered

ON A MELODRAMA

natural, would also in thirty years be considered artificial. He did not know that his loosened hair would look like ridiculous ringlets, that his loosened cloak would look like the cloak of a comic conspirator; that the next generation or two would think that *he* was the artificial old dandy. Least of all would he think, and small blame to him, that he would look artificial to a son or grandson who was himself wearing a stove-pipe top-hat and mutton-chop whiskers or the preposterous trousers of the 'seventies. In other words, while we can say that those preposterous trousers were preposterous, and much more preposterous than the elegant knee-breeches of the powdered ancestor, yet there will always be an additional absurdity which is relative and not positive, and comes solely from things being old-fashioned. And while we can say that the preposterous Victorian melodramas were preposterous, more preposterous than the elegant artificiality of *The School for Scandal*, yet some of the absurdity is only antiquity. And that absurdity we shall all inherit and exhibit, as soon as our own fashions have become antique.

For instance, it is more likely than not that, in eighty years, the little tricks and mannerisms of the new Noel Coward sort of comedy will seem utterly false and farcical. A new school of humour will produce a burlesque of the Noel Coward comedy, and every action

ON A MELODRAMATIC

will seem affectation. Whenever the hero or heroine lights a cigarette, a howl of joyful derision will go up, especially from the old playgoers, who can just remember that venerable and antiquated piece of mummery. When a servant comes in with a tray of cocktails, it will bring down the house with that deafening applause that is only given to really old and seasoned and almost prehistoric jokes. Almost every posture will look like a pose. Almost every word will be in the quaint old dictation of the earlier twentieth century. In short, Sir Gerald du Maurier's way of being natural will be exactly like Shelley's way of looking natural; it may remain beautiful, but it will not remain young.

There is a queerer thing to be learnt from the stale and stagey melodrama. It is this; that if an old thing is old enough, and a new thing is new enough, nobody will notice if they are almost the same thing. I mean that if there has been a long interval of other fashions between the first fashion and the last fashion, the dead thing can return in a new disguise without ever being detected. I have mentioned those rusty devices of melodrama, the soliloquy and the aside. They were used by Shakespeare; they were used by Dion Boucicault; they were used down to Victorian times; and they were used because they are useful. It does definitely help, not merely the melodramatic trick, but the dramatic truth

ON A MELODRAMA

of a scene, that the audience should hear something that the stage company do not hear. The result is that this fiction has reappeared in ultra-modern drama, in the form of an entirely new psychological and metaphysical theory of the theatre. The characters will soliloquize as loud as they like, and utter asides that are not said aside. The old convention was that, when a man spoke to a woman, she was not supposed to notice that he also whispered behind his hand to the audience. The new convention is that she is to go suddenly stone deaf when he says certain things, and miraculously recover the power of hearing when he says other things. That is something much more melodramatic than a melodrama. That is something that could only be described as a Miracle Play. I do not object to that; I am very fond of Miracle Plays and rather fond of melodramas. But it is odd that something that was laughed off the stage when it was at least barely possible, should return to the stage in triumph in the form of a stark, staring impossibility. It looks as if we should all have to go back to Miracle Plays—and possibly to miracles.

THERE are certain notions for which I have long argued, incompetently but industriously, in many places and for many years, seeking to make them prevail. Now nearly all of them are enjoying a triumph; and I do not like their triumph. This does not mean, the refined reader will be grieved to hear, that I have changed my mind about them; or that I feel even the faintest doubt that they are true. It only means that I fear that the world will see more of the triumph than of the truth. While they were hardly ever expressed, it was easier for them to be explained; when it is assumed that everybody understands them, it often only means that there are a great many more people to misunderstand them. It also means, I cannot but grieve to discover what many grey-bearded patriarchs must have discovered before me, that there are many more people than I had imagined who can only understand one idea at a time.

Sometimes the whole point of the real complaint is lost. The reaction is the very reverse of the right action. For instance, I was once concerned in controversy, along with Mr. Belloc and my friends, and did what I could

ON THE ONE-PARTY SYSTEM

to help a campaign against the old Party System, which reduced all the possibilities of politics to the rotation of the Two Front Benches. We dared to dispute the sacred oracle, which declared that every little boy and girl was either a little Liberal or else a little Conservative. It is not untrue to talk of it as a sacred oracle; for the Victorians, who are so much misunderstood when they are charged with mere solemnity, were really almost alone in human history the people who treated their comic poets and comic songs as a national religion. Their only fault was to be only too earnest in their enthusiasm and loyalty to *Alice in Wonderland*. Anyhow, we pointed out that it was an outrage to call a thing free government, when the voters are driven by their labels, into one of two narrow lobbies, by the activity (of all degrading images in the world) of Whips. We also pointed out other rather curious things that were done by Whips, such as the things concerned with Party Funds. Well, since those days several things have happened which might be regarded as corrections of that abuse or escape from that alternative. The Labour Party appeared; some time before the Liberal Party disappeared. So that, for a considerable period, there were no longer Two Parties but Three Parties. Then the Coalitions, in the time of the War, first began to preach the doctrine that there are not Three Parties but One Party.

ON THE ONE-PARTY SYSTEM

I know this sounds theological; but I can't help that. Then there was again a sort of Two-party System, between Labour and the Tories. And then there was another great rally to the idea of a united National Government; a Government which still exists to charm and console the world. I cannot say I ever believed very much in that sort of thing myself. It seemed too like saying that people whom you dislike separately would look nicer together; or that a man who cried out impatiently "A plague on both your houses!" would be quite satisfied to see both the houses side by side, like semi-detached villas. But whatever be the truth about that, it was at the time certainly regarded as a victory of a National System over the old Party System. And now the very groups and factions, that are in revolt against the National Government, are claiming to be more National than the National Government. Those of the Fascist or Hitlerite fashion of thought carry much further the theory of absolute Unification. They are not content to uphold the whole State against certain factions. They would apparently forbid the factions to uphold themselves against the State; or even apart from the State. But whether their view be right or no, or be here rightly described or no, it is certainly the whole trend of the reaction to override differences and concentrate political power. This is the common element in

ON THE ONE-PARTY SYSTEM

many such forms of social cure.

And yet it is not really a cure for the disease. It is not an attack on the original state of things at all. The real objection to the old Party System was not that it was a Two-party System; but that it pretended to be a Two-party System, when it was really a One-party System. The objection was not that there was too much conflict between the two Front Benches; but that there was too much collusion between the two Front Benches. It was not that the Government governed too zealously or the Opposition opposed too fiercely. It was that the Government only governed by arrangement with the Opposition and that the Opposition did not oppose at all. The unpopularity of Parliament did not arise from its being the scene of furious brawls and fanatical faction fights, like a medieval Italian city. It arose from its being the scene of tedious and trivial debates, like a tired debating club. As for the political power of government, that was already centralized; and a great deal too much centralized. It occupied a central position between the Prime Minister and the leader of the Opposition; not unfrequently in the form of an unknown financier who was advising them both. But, anyhow, it is not a real contradiction of the old Two-party System to set up the Totalitarian State. In that sense, the Two-party System was the Totalitarian State. That is,

ON THE ONE-PARTY SYSTEM

it monopolized the power of the State; and the power of the State was very much stronger even then than many innocent Liberals and theoretical democrats imagined. In other words, our old protest against professional politics has in one sense succeeded to a towering point of triumph. Many forms of corruption which were concealed are now confessed. The old tradition or travesty of representative government is unpopular. But it is by no means certain that it is unpopular for the right reason; or at least for all of the right reasons.

I have noticed the same ironical success in other departments. When I was young, it was very generally assumed that any man was a fool who was in possession of a faith. It was the fashion to assume that reason is the same as rationalism, and that rationalism is the same as scepticism; though it has since become obvious that the first real act of scepticism is to be doubtful about reason. Bullet-headed atheists went about in clubs and public-houses, who hit the table and said, "Prove it!" if anybody suggested that anybody had a soul. Now there has certainly been a very strong and healthy reaction against this very dull and dowdy negation. So, for that matter, I quite admit that Fascism has been in some ways a healthy reaction against the irresponsible treason of corrupt politics. A great body of living and logical apologetics has restored theology to its place in the scheme of

ON THE ONE-PARTY SYSTEM

thought. But I cannot deny that there has also been a reaction against rationalism, which seems to me to be simply a reaction towards irrationalism. There was undoubtedly a growth of Fundamentalism in America; but it was not a growth of any kind of theology or thought about religion. It was simply the artificial protection of a prejudice. That American type of revival has undoubtedly spread to England, sometimes in a very emotional form; but I am not very much consoled when an English clergyman describes how the Holy Ghost pressed upon him the advisability of buying a new dressing-gown. I never wanted a revival of religion that abolished reason; any more than I ever wanted a reform of government that abolished liberty. I opposed what was called rationalism, because I did not admit that it was rational; just as I criticized what was called democracy, because I did not believe that it was democratic. There seems to me some danger that the reaction may endanger the just ends as well as the unjust methods of reform; and lose the very ideals which the world had only touched to desecrate and parody. Hypocrisy is the homage that vice pays to virtue; but it is a rather dangerous form of homage, if it makes people hate the virtue because it has been aped by the vice. If the reaction is too simple, and sweeps away all that was really good in the nineteenth-century liberty or rationality,

ON THE ONE-PARTY SYSTEM

then it is easy to see what will happen. There will be a reaction against the reaction; and that in its turn will be as narrow as the reaction. The world will become at once monomaniac and mutable, always going mad on one notion at a time; and each returning after the temporary ruin of the other. In short, it will present a vast and ghastly parody of the theory of the old Two-party System.

I WAS asked the other day, quite suddenly, by a total stranger in a barber's shop, what book I should recommend to a woman in a state of depression. He was quite an intelligent stranger, and he managed to make the question quite an intelligent and intelligible question. I stopped instantly to answer him to the best of my ability, as naturally as I should have stopped to give him a light for his cigarette. And then, equally suddenly, I found myself confronted with the chasm that has opened between the present time and the time I most vividly remember. I was forced to ask myself the fundamental question: "What is to be said to the young pessimist, as distinct from the old pessimist?" I know all about the old pessimist. I have seen him wax and wane; I have seen him live and die. I know that it matters no more today that Swinburne said that the fruit of life is dust than that Byron said (much more truly) that there's not a joy the world can give like that it takes away. There was any amount of pessimism in the period in which I began to write. In fact, it was largely because of the pessimism that I did begin to

ON BOOKS FOR PESSIMISTS

write. The mere fact that I did begin to write, naturally, will be used as another argument on the side of the pessimist.

Nevertheless, there is a real issue involved. When I was a boy, the world really was divided into optimists and pessimists. Neither of the two terms is very philosophical; and perhaps neither of the two types were very real philosophers. But both the types were very real persons. You could not have made Walt Whitman a pessimist except by murdering the real Walt Whitman. You could not have turned Thomas Hardy into an optimist except by torturing him into something totally different from Thomas Hardy. A real fight was fought, a real controversy was engaged, in that Victorian era which some imagine to have been so stolid and unanimous. It was not, on the surface, a religious controversy. It prided itself, so to speak, on being an entirely irreligious controversy. Whitman was quite as much of a Freethinker as Hardy. He had the same facts of the material world before him; he had the same disdain of invoking any immaterial facts to assist him. The question was, quite simply: "Is Life worth living?" Even if Life is only what is involved in the word Biology. Putting aside immortality, is Life worth living? Putting aside heaven, is earth worth living in?

Now, when I was young, there were a number of

ON BOOKS FOR PESSIMISTS

writers who would say (in Mr. Asquith's famous phrase) that the answer is in the affirmative. They only depended slightly and indirectly, or at least in very different degrees, on any help outside this world. Browning was certainly on the side of religious belief, on the whole. Meredith was certainly against religious belief, on the whole. Stevenson, though he often used phrases expressing his sympathy with religion, did, on the whole, base his confidence on ideas apart from religion. But the point is that, in that older literary atmosphere, I should instantly have answered anybody who was depressed by saying, "Read Stevenson!" or "Read Browning!" or "Read Meredith!" And something suddenly told me, in the silence of the barber's shop, that it is no longer any good to tell pessimistic people to read these optimistic writers. Not that there is anything the matter with the optimistic writers. What is the matter is with the pessimistic people. But what *is* the matter with them?

It looks as if the old inquirers, from Job to John Galsworthy, wanted to be convinced that it was all right. It looks to me as if many modern inquirers only want to be convinced that it is all wrong. To bring them good news is to bring them bad news. For instance, suppose we could prove to the interminable procession of young Pacifists, who tell us that the Great

ON BOOKS FOR PESSIMISTS

War was an act of horrible cruelty, that it was an act of really unavoidable human necessity. I do not mean that I propose to prove it now, though I could make out a much stronger case for it than they imagine. But suppose, merely logically, and for the sake of an abstract argument, that it could be proved. Would the young pessimists be pleased? Would they instantly become young optimists? Would their refined features light up with joy and jollification; and would they be instantly reconciled to nationality and normal living? I fancy not. I fancy that the modern young man (after my alarm in the barber's shop, I avoid the topic of the modern young woman) really wants to be a pessimist. Now I do not believe that Thomas Hardy really wanted to be a pessimist. On the contrary, it seems to me that he took every incidental opportunity to avoid being a pessimist. Whenever he could describe the glories of the glowing southern landscape of England, he described it for the sake of its own beauty; he made his hills and valleys even more vivid than his men and women. There are passages in his novels which I still remember, alas! long after I have forgotten the novels. I can remember an impression of sweeping and splendid pastureage, ending with a line of noble and uplifted trees. But to the new pessimist it would seem a stretch of flat vegetation, ending in some unusually large vege-

ON BOOKS FOR PESSIMISTS

tables. That, it seems to me, is the trouble just now; not that so many people have found reasons for discontent, as there are always reasons for discontent, but that so many people wish to be discontented. So many people are discontented unless they can be discontented.

Little as I know of the original private problem mentioned in the barber's shop, I know it is not a case of this kind. I took it merely as a text for a wandering speculation; and the speculation has wandered very far. Nevertheless, I think it is one worth pursuing, in the hope of finding its logical end, which I do not profess to have found here. To put the matter very crudely: in the Victorian time even the atheists could be optimists. In the present Georgian time, the atheists are resolved to be pessimists. A man of genius like George Meredith could essentially, if not avowedly, pit Nature against God. A man of genius like Mr. Aldous Huxley is much more annoyed with Nature than he is with God. When I was a boy, I would have told any girl who was depressed to read *Treasure Island* and cheer up; therein doubtless underrating the complexity, nay, perversity, of girls. But I should have supposed that the fighting spirit of Stevenson was a real angle of attack upon life. What is much more important, Stevenson certainly thought it was a real angle of attack upon life. If I had been looking for optimists to answer pessi-

ON BOOKS FOR PESSIMISTS

mists like Schopenhauer and Hardy, I could instantly have turned to Browning or Whitman. And I will confess that, while I have myself found what I hold to be deeper justification of the glory of living, I still think that those jolly pagans of the Victorian time, like Whitman and Meredith, made out a good case for life. What I want to know is why those who are now boys, as I was then a boy, are so strangely and stubbornly twisted towards making a case against life? We also were morbid, because we were boys; we also were maniacs, because we were boys; we were quite capable of killing ourselves, because of the positive beauty of a particular woman; we also were quite capable of killing somebody else, because of the positive justice of a particular revolution. But it was always because of the positive goodness of a particular good thing. Why is it that so many people only want to make a case for the negative badness, not only of a bad thing, but of all things as being bad? The present generation has had more pleasure and enjoyment than any previous generation. Is that the right way of stating the riddle? Or is that the answer?

THE great Science of Finger-Prints, discovered by a brilliant French criminologist, has produced its principal or ultimate effect on the world, which is this: that whereas a gentleman was expected to put on gloves to dance with a lady, he may now be expected to put on gloves in order to strangle her. These changes in etiquette, or fine shades of fashion, may or may not correspond with an improvement in dancing or a decrease in strangling. The great Science of Criminology itself, discovered by an enterprising Italian Jew, has produced no such simple and practical result. It was conducted proudly and somewhat pompously on the following principles: that very poor men, and especially poor men more or less in the hands of the police, can safely have their ears pulled, their skulls measured, their teeth counted, tested, or pulled out, so as to establish by scientific methods a sort of composite photograph of all criminals, which was really a composite photograph of all very poor men. Whereas, if the scientific expert pays a call on an American millionaire, and says to him cheerily, "I have come to measure your ears," or "Per-

ON THE SCIENCE OF SOCIOLOGY

mit me to take a cast of your very simian facial angle," there is generally quite a scene before the scientific expert, in American language, pays for his excessive interest in the ears of others by being thrown out on his ear. There was therefore a serious gap in the galleries of criminal types which used to be published in the magazines of popular science; the defect being the entire absence of any types of anti-social activity who had ever had more than £200 a year. Yet we know, even in retrospect, that there were anti-social persons among those whose seclusion the scientific expert was thus forced to respect. Never once did Mr. Kreuger smile on us from that Rogues' Gallery which science spread before us; friends and admirers sought in vain for the benevolent countenance of Mr. Whitaker Wright among the physical types whom an inevitable doom drove into conflict with the law: all because of their abnormal noses or the peculiar shape of their ears.

It always seemed to me, therefore, even at the time when Lombroso and his lot were taken quite seriously by those who discussed the new possibilities of science, that the science suffered from an insufficiency of data or even an unfair selection of data. The true theory of thieves could not be found in these police statistics; because the statistical method in question was bound to ignore the very heads of the profession. If a man must

ON THE SCIENCE OF SOCIOLOGY

have one ear larger than another in order to make him steal sixpence, or in order to explain why he did steal sixpence, how vast in size and fantastic in outline must be the ear of a man who stole six millions by unscrupulous company-promoting! Surely the ears, noses, faces, and general appearance of some of these great financiers must have been hardly human, in their distortion of the ordinary human features; they must have been monsters and grotesque deformities hidden from the light of day. And yet their portraits, when we did see them (though not in the illustrative plates of books on criminology), were usually in the last degree smooth, bland, and serene. It was quite obvious, from a mere glance at their pictures, that no scientific expert had ever been allowed to badger them.

At about the same period in the past there was also a great Science of Sociology. I have really no notion of what has happened to that. We do sometimes see, even now, the name and nonsense of Lombroso invoked with solemnity in fourth-rate detective stories and very antiquated atheist pamphlets. Here and there, hidden, or rather buried, in some forgotten hamlet, there may be a dear old gentleman whom pitying relatives have left under the impression that there is a Science of Criminology. They have perhaps respected his hobby, the harmless and innocent hobby of looking at diagrams

ON THE SCIENCE OF SOCIOLOGY

which show the facial angle of a French *apache* or an Italian anarchist, to explain how it is that some human beings have been known to covet their neighbours' goods. But of the Science of Sociology I can gather no news; nor even make a guess about its horrid but hidden fate. I cannot even hope to find the white-bearded ancient in the hut in the lonely wood still studying Sociology, as I might find him studying Criminology or Astrology or Alchemy or the scientific results of combining the eye of the common newt with the toe of the edible frog. Even the word itself is now rarely encountered. Yet in its time it stood for a definite class of ideas; and those ideas are still hanging about in the atmosphere, under other names and in connexion with other sciences. But I doubt whether the strict and rigid meaning of Sociology, as I remember the term in the times before the Great War, will ever return in the face of present events, and of our most menacing and unstable Peace.

The original point of calling Sociology a science was that social actions were so precisely determined that they could be precisely predicted. There was no other real meaning in talking about a social science, as apart from the ordinary thing (which men have always known), which might be called a social philosophy, or a social outlook, or a social speculation. It was bound

ON THE SCIENCE OF SOCIOLOGY

up with that great art of Prophecy, which was the vein of mysticism running through the materialism of the world, between the war in South Africa and the war in Europe. It was then said on every side that we should soon be able to predict a crisis as easily as a comet; to calculate the time of a political explosion as well as of a chemical explosion; to foresee that the next national Cabinet would return after the Election, as we were sure that the migratory birds would return in spring. Sometimes, even in the old order, nay, even in the order of ornithology, odd things would happen; the birds would not return or the members would not be returned.

But that was the old order; and what we are facing now is not a new order, but a new disorder. I do not believe that the pretence of predicting political or social events as certain to happen will now survive the political and social events that have actually happened. I do not think the Prophet of Sociology can outlive the repeated blows of the Great War, of the Russian Revolution, of the Fascist Revolution, of the Hitlerite Revolution; not one of which the Prophet ever really prophesied. Nay, he came nearer to prophesying the earlier than the later events. A European War was always a possibility, but no scientific sociologist ever said it was a certainty. In one sense everybody knew that there might be a Russian

ON THE SCIENCE OF SOCIOLOGY

Revolution; indeed, there had already been a Russian Revolution. But Bolshevism was not the Russian Revolution; on the contrary, it was a new and unique thing that put an end to the Russian Revolution. And no intellectuals expected the actual thing called Bolshevism; least of all the Russian intellectuals.

The poor old Science of Sociology, however, might have survived these milder shocks. But will anybody pretend that anybody predicted Mussolini? Will any scientific sociologist say he had worked out a sociological weather-chart, dating the exact emergence and importance of Hitler? These recent revolutions or reactions, or whatever they are, depart more abruptly from the weather-chart even than the weather. Can we hope, perhaps, that all of us will begin to see what some of us can claim to have seen from the beginning: three great truths or dogmas on which all history hangs? (1) That humanity is far too complex to have such calculations made about it. (2) That humanity is afflicted with original sin. (3) That the will of man is free. Granted these three facts, it is obvious that nobody can predict that nobody will start this or that idea, will start it even if it has been unsuccessful, will start it even if it may fail again, will start it even if it is wicked, and its success therefore more wicked than its failure. There are too many men, each with too many moods,

ON THE SCIENCE OF SOCIOLOGY

each with too many influences on them varying from instant to instant, to predict how the man will jump; for he is much more capricious than that lazy animal the cat. Let us at least thank all the rioters and brawlers and demagogues and dictators and casual despots for their one good deed in destroying the Science of Sociology. Even the Futurists themselves have made the Future free.



XXVIII

On the Letter-Bag Novel

SOME are now suggesting that the Novel is near to its end; and, if so, its end is curiously like its beginning. Perhaps it is too much to say that the first childhood of fiction is now repeating itself in its second childhood. These metaphors from physical nature are among the worst monstrosities of materialism; and they are devouring monsters. There is no animal parallel in such things; and ideas do not grow grey whiskers, or heresies go bald, or truths lose their teeth. But there is a certain analogy, if we remember that it is only an analogy, touching the return of some human impulses to their original home. Much that is called modern, in the most modern fiction, resembles the crude stuff that Defoe first began to dig out of the stiff clay of fact. Few modern novels are so poetical as *Robinson Crusoe*; but many are much more prosaic than *Moll Flanders*. The most novel sort of novel is that of which we are doubtful whether it is a novel at all. And in that it really has a rough resemblance to the first rough experiment, before it was a novel at all. In theory, at least, there is nothing to prevent a modern story from wandering like

ON THE LETTER-BAG NOVEL

Gil Blas or sprawling like *Tristram Shandy*; and other causes must be blamed if it does not walk or wander so elegantly as the one or sprawl so exuberantly as the other.

But there is one particular point in which I think the novel, if it does not grow merely formless, may well return to its ancient form. Novels like those of Richardson are often hastily regarded as formless, mostly because the modern reader is often overcome by an impression that they are endless. Yet I doubt if they are really longer than the *Clissold* of Mr. Wells or the tremendous trilogies of Mr. Walpole. Anyhow, the Victorians left a tradition that the early Georgian volumes were very voluminous. That is perhaps because the Victorians were working up to the brief but brilliant period when stories were supposed to be brief and brilliant; as in the sharp, stylistic tales of Stevenson, or the expanded epigrams of Kipling. However that may be, romance, as Richardson began it, had the name of being at best a leisurely and at worst a laborious study. Even Macaulay, who admired or even adored *Clarissa*, advised his friends to throw themselves into it by beginning at the third volume, and skipping all the letters to Italians from Italians or about Italians. I am sure there are many bold and Bolshevik novels now which would be most enjoyable if we began with the

ON THE LETTER-BAG NOVEL

last chapter, and skipped all remarks made by Russians to Russians or about Russians. At the end as at the beginning, therefore at both extremes, there is a certain indefinable element that seems vast and dim and dizzy; something that Stevenson would have called being out of focus; or not being sufficiently sharp and short. But it is not this point, but a more particular point, that I would note touching the Richardsonian roots or origins of romance.

Everyone knows that a tale like *Clarissa* was told almost entirely in the form of letters. It was this that made many of the intermediate intellectual school, of direct and dramatic action, feel that this form of fiction was so very formal. It was felt to be not only stilted, but slow and sleepy; largely because the human race (in its present or recent progressive stage) was progressively forgetting how to write any letters, let alone such long letters. The boy who liked something very rapid and rattling, like Kipling or O. Henry, was also the boy who felt it an agonizing bore to write to his grandmother at Christmas. So he recoiled with horror from the huge eighteenth-century romances, regarding them as so many stacks of letters to and from other people's grandmothers. But, in fact, the boy was wrong; as he sometimes is, despite the current creed, when he assumes that he can teach his grandmother. The ancient

ON THE LETTER-BAG NOVEL

novelists of the polite epoch were right; and some of the modern novelists, even of this very impolite epoch, have already begun to find it out.

The fact is that the old form of a series of letters is really an extremely good way to tell a story. It is not more conventional and constrained; it is in many ways much more unconventional and unconstrained. For the novel must either be a novel of correspondence or else a novel of conversation. And this sort of writing is really much freer than most forms of talking. It is freer for two reasons: first, that a man can talk all the time without being a bounder or a bore; and, second, that a man will confess in correspondence with one person what he would not confess in conversation with four or five persons. Also, while he is talking to them, he will not talk about them. But when he is writing a love-letter, and telling his fiancée about them, he will tell her all about them. It does not follow, however, that the lady will agree with him about them. So she will write another long letter, throwing on each person a new light from another angle or aspect; and other letters will criticize the characters from other angles or aspects. It is really remarkable how rapidly a character can thus be not only sketched but sculptured; that is, presented in the round like a real object. Whereas mere conversation in a story is rather too like conversation of the

stage: there is something stagey and stiff about it, because the types are fixed in the one attitude in which the author wants to present them or they want to present themselves.

In the witty conversational novel they are all dressed up for the footlights; in the more casual correspondence novel we get many more glimpses of them in undress, in dressing-gowns or shirt-sleeves, as seen by all sorts of accidental people at all sorts of accidental times. Therefore the old-fashioned, apparently lumbering device of the big letter-bag, with which Richardson in *Clarissa* created the Novel, and Scott in *Redgauntlet* renewed the Waverley Novels, has in fact been adopted by many fine writers of quite recent times. Mr. Maurice Baring has often used it, as a way of opening many windows upon his subject and filling the story with that white and almost colourless daylight that lies over so many of his scenes. Mr. E. V. Lucas has employed it in a lighter but equally luminous manner, in those felicitous and unclassifiable books which are a sort of happy hybrid between the essay and the novel. And it looks as if this old method of recording life by letters is likely to be applied in other departments. The detective story is supposed to demand, more than other stories, a direct attack and a dash *in medias res*: that is, the dagger sticking in the very middle of the millionaire.

ON THE LETTER-BAG NOVEL

But I recently read an extremely good detective story, told in what would be called the slower method of correspondence; and it was not slower, but much more swift.

I have noted in a previous essay that modern drama, coldly contemptuous of melodrama, had solemnly banished the old fiction of the Soliloquy or the Aside; and then, equally solemnly, brought them back again, pretending they are a new futuristic technique for permitting people's subconsciousness to talk out loud without being heard. But the old expedient of the literary letter-bag achieves this object without either sort of oddity: without the awkward swagger of the Victorian villain, confiding to the gallery or hissing loud secrets behind his hand; and also without the much sillier swagger of the mere modernistic crank who thinks anything stark and Slavonic so long as it is incredible and crude. A man really does soliloquize in a long letter; and, since it is addressed to one person, it is really a long aside. Both in the case of the novel and of the drama, the moral is that things often renew their life by going back to their infancy.

NOT very long ago, men complained of the cynic, saying that he was hard and had no human feelings. Now they are asked rather to respect the cynic, because his feelings are so soft and sensitive. This is a curious change, but a real one, and one that has not been adequately noticed. There is a type of modern youth which is cynical not because it is thick-skinned, but because it is thin-skinned. It has exactly the same tendency to shudder at anything conventional as the Victorian spinster had to shudder at anything unconventional. Indeed, the cynical youth is in many ways very like the Victorian spinster, only not so self-controlled. There is, however, in his world of culture exactly the same fundamental weakness that really weakened the worst parts of the old world of convention. I mean, there is the horror of certain phrases as such, of certain allusions and associations, without any real effort to reduce them to any system recognized by the reason. The new type of sensitive is sickened by anything that he would call sentimental, just as the spinster was by anything that she would call cynical. In both cases it is a matter of

ON THE TOUCHY REALIST

associations and not of analysis; and it matters more what words are used than what thought is presented. The truly refined youth will turn pale green at the mention of a mother's love or be seriously unwell on hearing of a happy marriage; just as the refined of more remote days would feel very sick if they read his little poems about torture or typhus fever. I know a distinguished lady who can hardly even hear the words, "women and children," though merely as a convenient classification, without being carried fainting from the room. People are positively nervous about mentioning duty or conscience or religion, because of the high-strung and delicately poised sanity of the new sort of cynic. It is not altogether as a joke that he tells you that, if you say such words, he will scream. Often, even as you hear him casually speaking, you can tell that he is near to screaming. This is something more than a perversity; it is an inversion, and an inversion which amounts to a sort of mental malformation. If our aunts ought to have been able to hear of immorality without fainting, surely our nephews might brace themselves to hear about morality without throwing an epileptic fit. The real and reasonable question of morality and immorality awaits discussion; and it will not be best discussed by epileptics, even if they are also cynics.

All this has ended in a sort of Manichean madness

ON THE TOUCHY REALIST

against the fundamental facts of life. It is as if every humour of the human body were a disease; every organ were a cancerous growth; the whole make-up of man consisting of nothing but parasitic organisms. From many modern novels and plays, one would suppose that *all* maternal affection was a "possessive" tyranny of egotistical tenderness; as if *all* domestic contentment were a paralytic stroke of arrested mental progress; as if *all* natural defence of normal privacy and honour were a disease of atavistic jealousy and subhuman segregation. That there are mothers who are too possessive, or wives who are too conventional, or husbands who are too selfish or unsociable is a fact so obvious that it has been satirized by all the satirists of human history. But the modern thing I mean carries with it quite a different implication. It implies not that the fruit is sometimes rotten, but that the root is always rotten; and the further that feeling goes, the more it works backwards to a rottenness in the very roots of the tree of life. It rather resembles a sort of rage of amputation in a mad surgeon who has forgotten the difference between the malady and the man. There is nothing that needs a sense of proportion so much as amputation; and in this inhuman philosophy it has gone far beyond the cutting off of the hand, or the plucking out of the eye, which symbolize the extremes of asceticism. We may tolerate

ON THE TOUCHY REALIST

the dentist, who passes from the curing of toothache to the universal pulling out of teeth. We need not tolerate the psychologist, whose only cure for a headache is cutting off the head. It will be some time before the psychologist can provide an artificial head, as the dentist can provide an artificial set of teeth.

Meanwhile the general stampede against nature goes on, and the paradise of the future looks more and more like a world of wigs, wooden legs, glass eyes, and everything that must be right because nature must be wrong. Just as these men would have forgotten that there is such a thing as the healthy human body, which we may or may not be able to restore, so they have forgotten entirely that there is a healthy condition of the natural emotions, quite apart from whether it was perfectly attained by our immediate parents in the immediate past. Those who are now called Pagans actually do what they themselves have chiefly blamed in the Puritans: they despise the body and all the affections that lie nearest to the body. Their aestheticism, more than any asceticism, has produced a repugnance for the real facts of life. Christians renounced the world, the flesh, and the devil; the new heathens do their best to accept the devil; but they have not stomach enough really to accept either the flesh or the world.

This is a new and curious philosophical phase. In

many it is not yet conscious. But for many it will be the final phase of that fury of fastidiousness which already rages in them against the mere mention of common affections or even natural habits. It is an odd thing that a movement which set out with a claim to satisfy the most perilous natural passions should end by being unsatisfied even with the most harmless natural affections. But the serpent always bites his own tail; and the whirlwind always turns upon itself; and all the emanations of evil in history have always described this strange curve and ended up by contradicting themselves. The excess of Private Judgment ended in Prussianism; the excess of Prohibitionism and Puritanism ended in a government of bootleggers and gangsters; the excess of cut-throat competition, born of the Manchester School, ended in the universal tyranny of the Monopoly and the Trust. This is not the first time in history that the excess of Paganism has led to mere Pessimism, and its name now, like its name two thousand years ago, is, or ought to be, Manicheanism. It appears at that point when men can no longer distinguish between the leprosy that is devouring the life and the life which it devours; when their rage against the weeds that choke the flowers passes into a wild feeling that all flowers are weeds; when the tares and the wheat seem so hopelessly entangled that the demented farmer is more angry with

ON THE TOUCHY REALIST

the wheat than with the tares. That was the frame of mind in which many men, in the age of St. Augustine, for instance, passed from a Greek glorification of nature to an Oriental glorification of nothing; because nature herself demanded sacrifice and life itself imposes limits. By ignoring limits, they lost all sense even of the limit that divides life and death, and finally found in death the only unlimited liberty. That ancient and tragic transformation from the Pagan to the Manichee is passing through many minds, and fulfilling itself before our very eyes today; and whether there be any cure for it, deeper than the destruction itself, this is no place to inquire.

But we can protest against history and human experience being distorted by these fleeting fads and fashions. Because we know nothing at all about Cornelia, except that she loved her children and called them her jewels, we need not tolerate the nonsense of somebody who says that she must have been a "possessive" mother, devouring her children's lives with destructive affection. Because we know nothing whatever about Scaevola, except that he is said to have thrust his hand in the fire as a defiance to the enemies of his country, we need not listen to the rubbish of recent psychopathologists, who will doubtless suggest that he had a perverted sexual pleasure in feeling pain. Because there

ON THE TOUCHY REALIST

is nothing known about Absalom, except that he indulged in a very ordinary human freak of getting up against his father, we need not rush to the exploded doctrines of Freud to find an unproved jealousy about an unrecorded mother. We can keep our common sense, and know that ordinary things are so called because they often happen, and that they need no explanation but the order of things as they are.

I WAS lately looking into a new book about Wordsworth, which may broadly be described as a defence of Wordsworth. At first sight it might appear that Wordsworth is hardly an historical person who needs white-washing. There might almost appear to be too much of such an element about. I mean that in some versions he appears rather too white, and in other versions rather too washy. Indeed, the publisher's note affixed by the Cambridge University Press to the book in question (which is called *The Later Wordsworth*, by Miss Edith C. Batho) seems rather to go to the other extreme. We all know that Wordsworth's youth was the time when he sympathized with the democratic vision of the idealists in Paris; we all know that he had a youthful entanglement in France; and we all know, or most of us think, that this earlier period was the period of his most fruitful and creative poetry. Still, most of us know what we mean when we say that Wordsworth was Wordsworth; and could hardly be mistaken for Byron. In the light of this, there is something a little challenging in a note which says, "His

ON WORDSWORTH

stormy youth offers at first sight a striking contrast to the apparent tranquillity of his maturity and age."

The contrast, as stated, seems not only striking but almost alarming. It hardly seems as if one juvenile love affair, however improper, was sufficient to turn Wordsworth into a stormy character. And why does the publisher or editor employ that dark and sinister phrase, "The apparent tranquillity of his maturity and age"? Are we to infer that Wordsworth at the age of seventy or eighty was still secretly painting the town red; and writing a sonnet on Westminster Bridge at daybreak when he came home with the milk? Can it be insinuated that even as a Victorian under Queen Victoria he continued but concealed his orgies? I hasten to say that I am well aware that this cannot be the meaning of the phrase; but the phrase seems to me unluckily selected. Presumably the word "stormy" really refers rather to his exultation in the great political storm; that is, his early sympathy with the French Revolution. Stevenson classed it among the baffling incongruities of genius that Wordsworth wore blue spectacles. We may admit, symbolically speaking, that he did at one time look at revolution through red spectacles; and perhaps at modern political theories through rose-coloured spectacles. But it is clear from this biography, as from any other, that he very rapidly lost that rosy vision; and,

ON WORDSWORTH

with or without the help of spectacles, relapsed quite sufficiently into the blues. The youth, to quote his own words of an even earlier illumination, may be the vision splendid, have been on his way attended; but certainly the man perceived it die away and fade into the light of common day. And it is only fair to say that Wordsworth, at his best, could sometimes do more than most people with the light of common day; and even make it in flashes, like the light that never was on sea or land.

Anyhow, we may submit that this greater Wordsworth would have been easier to present as The Earlier Wordsworth than as The Later Wordsworth. Though Miss Bacho writes with considerable spirit in defence of his whole career, especially in the later chapters, it is inevitable that there should be this relative flatness in the later life. The book is bound to consist far too much of mere records of what the old gentleman thought of the politics of his time; which was often pretty much what all the other old gentlemen were thinking of the politics of their time, or rather of a time that was no longer really theirs. She does succeed in showing, however, that he retained some real popular sympathies and generous social ideas down to the day of his death; as, for instance, that, in a matter like the Ten Hour Bill, the old Tory was on the side of the poor where many Radicals were on the side of the rich. But the chief im-

ON WORDSWORTH

pression left by her apologia is a curious vein of reflection upon the contradictions and inversions of all that strange period of history that stretches from the French Revolution to the Russian Revolution. William Wordsworth does really stand as a representative figure in all that transition; the more because he was charged with changing so much; and yet more again, because he really changed so little.

There is something that is always discovered by men if they live long enough; and Wordsworth lived very long; quite long enough to discover it, though he did not say very much about it. It is something quite distinct from his reaction against revolution in early middle age; indeed, it is not merely a reaction against revolution; it is quite as much a reaction against reaction. It might be called the fact that the world goes round; as distinct from the fact that the world goes on. It is quite consistent with the admission that in some respects the world may go on; or that it does go on. The point is that the young very often mistake for the movement of going on, what is, so far, only the movement of going round. Between fourteen and forty, a man sees a great tide coming in and another tide ebbing away; and associates the first with the future and the second with the past. But by the time he is fifty, he has generally begun to realize what is meant by ebb and flow, and by the

ON WORDSWORTH

turn of the tide. He may even happen to be in favour of the tide that is flowing today; or he may look forward to the counter-flood that may flow tomorrow; but he does not think that the movement tomorrow is certain to be a mere extension of the movement today. Of course, I abjure with horror the heresy that human wills are controlled like tides; I heartily agree that humanity is not forced to go backwards and forwards, any more than it is forced to go forward or to go back. But in practical experience the human being generally does go back. And he goes back for one of the commonest and most practical reasons for going back: because he has left something behind. There is such a thing as social wreck, like the wreck of Robinson Crusoe's ship. There is such a thing as social progress, like the progress of Robinson Crusoe's farm. But where the philosophers are wrong and the romancer is right, and indeed very realistic, is that Robinson Crusoe will have to go back very often to the wreck in order to stock or furnish the farm. When there really is anything like the building of a new civilization, it means that there has been a great deal of quarrying in the ruins of the old civilization. When there is only a false start, a half-built farmhouse, a half-baked culture and bankruptcy, it means that the reformers have tried to simplify life too much; they have left behind them all that they wanted most.

ON WORDSWORTH

It is a proverb that Wordsworth outlived the triumph of his first political ideal. It is less noticed that he also outlived the triumph of his second political ideal. The vision of the Holy Alliance, as seen by Alexander, was quite as Apocalyptic as the vision of the Republic One and Indivisible as seen by Robespierre. Wordsworth, as an Englishman, might call himself a Tory; but English Tories had a good deal to do with discouraging the second vision as well as the first. Perhaps it would be an exaggeration to say that Pitt killed the Revolution and Canning killed the Reaction. But at least a man learned in time that revolution and reaction alternately kill each other. The world that Wordsworth saw growing around him, in his old age, was not the world of liberty promised by the Jacobins or the peace of Christendom promised by the Kings. It was an urban and suburban world, which would have been hated by Wordsworth quite as much as by Shelley. It was full of a crude and Cockney philosophy of competition. Wordsworth lived long enough finally to resent and resist that advancing fashion. If Wordsworth had lived a little longer, he would have seen it as a retreating fashion, as a vanishing fashion. He would have found the flat contrary of competition, Socialism and even Communism, coming in as the religion of the future. But he would have been wrong again, if he had thought that it *was* the religion

ON WORDSWORTH

of the future. By this time, we have got another religion of the future, exactly the opposite; Fascism, and probably they none of them will really live to be the religion of the future at all.

WE talk of people living in the past; and it is commonly applied to old people or old-fashioned people. But, in fact, we all live in the past, because there is nothing else to live in. To live in the present is like proposing to sit on a pin. It is too minute, it is too slight a support, it is too uncomfortable a posture, and it is of necessity followed immediately by totally different experiences, analogous to those of jumping up with a yell. To live in the future is a contradiction in terms. The future is dead; in the perfectly definite sense that it is not alive. It has no nature, no form, no feature, no vaguest character of any kind except what we choose to project upon it from the past. People talk about the dead past; but the past is not in the least dead, in the sense in which the future is dead. The past can move and excite us, the past can be loved and hated, the past consists largely of lives that can be considered in their completion; that is, literally in the fullness of life. But nobody knows anything about any living thing in the future, except what he chooses to make up, by his own imagination, out of what he regrets in the past or what

ON FACING FACTS

he desires in the present. Anyone of the Utopias, or visions of the future, such as were written by Wells or William Morris or Bellamy or any number of others, is simply a patchwork of the past. It can be taken to pieces, and analysed into its component parts in the memories of mankind; a scientific appliance taken from the nineteenth century; a type of craftsmanship taken from the fourteenth century; a sort of diet taken from the Orientals; a sort of drapery taken from the Greeks. The real disadvantage of this sort of Futurism is that it is much too much disposed to dig in the past; to dig anywhere so long as it is in the past; but, above all, to dig in the most remote past. Thus the Communists tell us that Communism prevailed in some prehistoric period, and many Pacifists support their ideal by a theory that war was a late and artificial addition to the early history of man. Where there is, perhaps, a real need of correction is in correcting this. It is in bringing back these wandering antiquaries from the remote past to the recent past. The most dangerous gap in general knowledge is the gap in the minds of most men about what happened to their own fathers. They often know rather more about what happened to their grandfathers, and much more about what happened to their great-grandfathers.

Let me, like a good patriot, begin by criticizing the

ON FACING FACTS

defects of my own country. Nobody understands England today, and nobody will understand England tomorrow, least of all the Englishman, if he does not realize that a thousand things in his whole mind and make-up refer back to a fairly recent fact; that he was in the nineteenth century the richest man in the world; we might even say the only rich man in the world. It was not only prosperity, but this isolation in prosperity, that made him insular. For it is not islands that make us insular. Nobody ever said that the old Greek islands were particularly insular. The materialistic attempt to explain man by material conditions is always wrong. It was this peculiar prosperity of the Englishman in an exhausted Europe, after Waterloo (or, rather, the philosophy producing and pursuing it), that produced endless eccentricities that still remain.

In that very Victorian novel, *The Woman in White*, that very Victorian villain, Sir Percival Glyde, says to the Italian villain: "You foreigners are all alike." He said it to Count Fosco, who was not at all like most other foreigners, let us hope, and, in any case, was an Italian, and therefore utterly different from a Russian or a Spaniard. But what Sir Percival meant, in the language of his time, was that all foreign Counts were beggarly foreign Counts. Count Fosco, he felt, would have been quite as beggarly if he had been a Spanish

ON FACING FACTS

Count or a Russian Count. Now no other nation in Europe had that queer and sweeping generalization. There were any number of Jingoes and Imperialists and exaggerated patriots in all the countries of Europe. But no French *chauvinist* thought that a Prussian was pretty much the same sort of person as a Portuguese. No Russian Imperial statesman thought the Poles were the same as the Germans, however much he might be oppressing one or plotting against the other. No Austrian thought the English must be like the Turks, merely because they were not like the Austrians. That peculiar *sort* of sweeping view of "foreigners" was peculiar to the English mind, and it has not entirely vanished from the English subconscious mind. It was rooted in the mood which first tolerated, and then worshipped, the towering fortunes made by the great Whig nobles, overtopping the Crown itself; as in the celebrated phrase of Queen Victoria herself, who said to one of them: "I come from my house to your palace." It was perfectly true that, compared to those Dukes at that period, almost every foreign Count was a beggarly Count. Only some of us happen to hold a philosophy by which being a beggar might be even better than being a Count.

Now it is the same in another way with the Germans, or, rather, especially with the Prussians. Only I

ON FACING FACTS

will mingle my confessions with this last patriotic boast; that I do think that the English, however muddle-headed, have more common sense. About the time, or a little after the time, of the great English prosperity came the brief and brilliant period of Prussian victory. At Sadowa, the Prussian sabre suddenly knocked the sceptre out of the hand of the Holy Roman Emperor. Hardly anybody realizes the importance of that stroke, so wholly do we live in our own time and so little in our fathers' time. The effect was enormous; more enormous than the earthquake of 1870 in France. For it has, in fact, transferred the sceptre and everything else from the old German Emperors on the Danube to the new German Emperors on the Spree. It is proved in the very fact that when we said "The Kaiser," we did not mean the old historic Kaiser; that when we say "Germany," we do not mean what men from the twelfth to the eighteenth century meant by the Empire of the Germans. Then followed the more sensational capture of Paris and violent acquisition of two unquestionably French Provinces. Now the Germans have been living ever since on that brief triumphant period, more fully and blindly than we are living on our brief prosperous period. They are a race naturally mythological and living in the clouds, as one of their own greatest poets very truly said. The crash of

ON FACING FACTS

the economic depression has come to us; and we at least have begun to suspect dimly that we are not quite so rich as we were. But the crash of the Great War, and the defeat, came to them; and they simply could not believe it. For a time they were stunned; which was called the interlude of enlightened government. But they had always been told that they were invincible, and, sooner or later, at some date long enough after the defeat, they were due to begin boasting again that they are invincible.

That is the meaning of Hitler and the whole hysteria of today. Mythology has returned; the clouds are rolling over the landscape, shutting out the broad daylight of fact; and Germans are wandering about saying they will dethrone Christ and set up Odin and Thor. But we cannot understand it by looking only at the last ten years of peace, or even at the original five years of war. The meaning of it, like the meaning of the insular placidity even of the most bewildered Englishman, is hidden in those previous years which are often forgotten, between the end of history and the beginning of journalism. We must realize how strongly the German believed, as in Luther's hymn, that he was in an impregnable fortress; just as the Englishman once believed that he was in an unbreakable Bank. But, as I say, when all is fairly considered, and that without

ON FACING FACTS

insular prejudices, I do think that the English come out the better of the two. We are beginning to let it dawn on us, in a dazed way, that we are not in a position to patronize the whole world in the matter of money, and we shall put up with our poverty in as manly a manner as we may. But at least we do not all go mad and rush out into the street screaming that we are all millionaires; we do not recognize the general ruin by shouting that all our own pockets are stuffed with pearls and diamonds; we do not tell an astounded world that we are still as rich as we were when Consols were at their highest. And that would be the commercial parallel to the madness of Mr. Hitler.



THE problem of Free Verse, like the problem of the African Race in the American Republic, seems to be rather more problematical after it has been freed than it was before it was freed. Anybody now can print as much free verse as he likes, without being out of fashion, or even against convention. And yet the thing has never become quite normal; even if it becomes universal. There remains a puzzle about it; about exactly how far a more regular rhythm was a harmony or a restraint, which makes every scrap of verse without metre or rhyme turn into a sort of riddle; and a riddle (we may remark) generally did sound most mystical and alluring when it was in metre and rhyme. The primary case for free verse was always fair enough, so far as it went. There certainly are verbal rhythms which are not exactly those of any classical metre, but which do produce an effect which is not merely that of prose, but rather of a sort of chant or incantation. There are a great many in the English translation of the Bible. "O my son Absalom; O Absalom my son"; "Or ever the silver cord be loosed and the golden bowl is broken;

ON FREE VERSE

and the pitcher is broken at the fountain and the wheel broken at the cistern." The interweaving of the word "broken" is itself an unbroken pattern. And the same fine effect has sometimes been produced in modern free verse. I know one passage in a poem of Mr. T. S. Eliot, which begins, I think, "Pray for Rinaldo, avid of speed and power," which might really satisfy the most classical critic who was—well, who was avid of speed and power. But I have read other poems of T. S. Eliot in which I cannot perceive any rhythm or direction at all; certainly nothing which he, being a cultivated and versatile man, could not have expressed better in classic verse or classic prose.

I happen to have before me a poem by the late D. H. Lawrence, about whom so many people seem suddenly and simultaneously moved to write books and articles. But I am not going to write an article about D. H. Lawrence, but only about the particular form he chose for this particular poem. It does not raise any of the disturbing questions about Lawrence about which so many of his friends and foes seem to be disturbed. There are certain ethical controversies in which I should believe myself to be on the side of civilization, and in which I think he would, quite honestly, avow himself on the side of barbarism. But those questions do not arise here. Even those who would most indignantly

ON FREE VERSE

declare that what I call barbarism was a beneficent revolution would not pretend that this poem is at all revolutionary. Its theme is one of the very oldest themes, even of the very oldest poets. It is the glory of the Homeric Age, which must have been glorified in pretty nearly every age since the Homeric Age. It is that never-fading freshness that seems to lie upon the glittering Greek Islands and the first myths of our culture. There is nothing revolutionary about it, unless writing free verse is still revolutionary. And I only wish to inquire, in a friendly spirit, whether writing free verse is really an assistance to writing good verse. I am not calling in question the powers of the poet; I am simply asking whether the same poet would have produced the same poem, or a better or a worse poem, if he had chosen to write it in the traditional forms of poetry. In other words, I would take this one piece of free verse merely as a test of how much verse does gain or lose by being what is called free. It is only a sort of parlour game, but it is a problem that happens to amuse me. First of all, let us take the free verse poem as it stands. It is called "The Argonauts":

They are not dead, they are not dead!
Now that the sun, like a lion, licks his paws and goes
slowly down the hill:

ON FREE VERSE

now that the moon, who remembers, and only cares
that we should be lovely in the flesh, with bright,
crescent feet,
pauses near the crest of the hill, climbing slowly, like a
queen
looking down on the lion as he retreats.

Now the sea is the Argonaut's sea; . . .

I cannot quote the whole, but it ends with a sharp command not to bring the coffee or *pain grille* till the ships of Odysseus have sailed past.

Now I hope I shall not be misunderstood if I say that the first impression I have is that, while this mode of utterance has become free verse, it has not become free poetry. I mean that it has not produced any purely poetical effect that is freer or wilder or more elemental, magical, or hitherto uncaptured than Shelley or Swinburne or any good poet has produced in formal poetry. It is more conversational; it is not more primeval or even more barbaric. It is more like talk; but not more like tempests loosened or passions made alive. It seems to me, I confess, that the actual effect of the feeling of liberty is even a certain limpness. "As he retreats" is a weaker ending than so able a writer could have put into a sonnet. The only phrase that claims to be original looks oddly artificial. It is not merely the literal logical

ON FREE VERSE

point: that the sun is seldom observed to lick its paws. It is that the image does not really suit the lion any more than the sun; certainly not the lion taken as a noble symbol of the sun. It has no imaginative fitness; licking the paws could only remind us that the lion is like the pussycat on the hearth-rug; the last thing we want to think when he represents the archaic energy of the Sun God. It looks to me as if Lawrence, writing in the spirit of an ancient poem, unconsciously felt he must put in something to show he was a modern poet. But does the freer form really give him a chance of stronger effects? I doubt it. Suppose he had chosen to write the same thought in unfree verse; as so clever a man could doubtless have done much better than I can. Suppose he had begun something like this:

They are not dead! The sun like a golden lion
Goes down to that red desert where he dies;
The moon, that is bare of all but bodily beauty,
The moon, that is careless of all but bodily beauty,
Looks down on the dying lion where he lies;
Like a queen, from the steep skies.

This sea is of the Argo. Great Odysseus, etc.

I only give this, of course, as a very ordinary sample of the old classical or even rhetorical verse, which any

ON FREE VERSE

educated man could write; I am concerned wholly with the inquiry of whether this old style is not really rather stronger than the new style. Many great men have written in the new style, and believed it would be stronger. "Easily-written, loose-fingered chords," said Walt Whitman, "I feel the thrum of your climax and close." But that is exactly what I do not do; I do not feel that "as he retreats" is the best that Lawrence could do for a climax and close. A stronger sense of the rolling sea of the Argonauts comes over me with the long rolling line of "Atalanta":

From the Acroceraunian hills to the ford of the Fleece of Gold.

I merely propound this as the practical problem of free verse; of whether the freedom really does tend to liberty or only to laxity. I fancy the poet here fell between two stools; between the classic tripod of Delphi and the prosaic wooden stool that Puck pulled from under the old woman; the type of the more modern spirit of abrupt bathos and the grotesque. I am very fond of the grotesque; and in some ways I much prefer Puck to Apollo. But, strictly as a critical problem, I doubt whether the modern manner does make better creative poetry in a description of the tall ships of Ulysses going by the Isles of Greece.

I RECENTLY had the honour of taking part in one of those Mock Trials organized at the London School of Economics, with the intention of supporting a charity by very uncharitable denunciations of every class of the community in turn. Before I arrived on the scene, actors, authors, and many other respectable guilds had been duly blackened and slandered to the satisfaction of the audience, and it fell to my lot to take away the character of several friends of mine who belong to the profession known as Art. Among the villains of the piece were Sir William Rothenstein and Mr. Eric Gill, and some of the ideas developed by the latter, in the course of his defence, are very luminously set out in a book he has recently published: a collection of essays called *Beauty Looks After Herself*. It is not for me to recall in detail the horrors of that dreadful day. So far as I could see, the Artists left the Court without a stain on their characters, and the Prosecuting Counsel left it having lost any character that he had left. But his interest in intellectual ideas survives any such deplorable lapse in his social morals, and he was, and is, very

much interested in the ideas of Mr. Eric Gill. Roughly speaking, the intellectual situation is this.

My own general thesis was somewhat to this effect: that Artists have worried the world by being wantonly, needlessly, and gratuitously progressive. Politicians have to be progressive; that is, they have to live in the future, because they know that they have done nothing but evil in the past. But Artists, who have been right from the beginning of the world, who were, perhaps, the only people who were right even in the beginning of the world, decorating pottery or designing rude frescoes on the rock when other people were fighting or offering human sacrifice, they have no right to despise their own past. Their fickleness and mutability is wanton; and all legal systems roughly agree that extra blame attaches to a crime that is wanton. The millionaire who carefully removes all the pennies from a blind beggar's hat is blamed—if, indeed, a modern millionaire is ever really blamed. The man who bashes-in the head of a lady, a total stranger to whom he has never been introduced, is rebuked for the callousness of his social behaviour, if he cannot plead, in extenuation, before a modern court, that she is his wife, or his mother, or the sister he has promised to support, or somebody towards whom a man is now supposed to be in a necessary and permanent state of hostility. But to make a

ON ERIC GILL

scene, as a murderer must always make a scene—to kick up a row, to create a riot, when there are no comprehensible causes of exasperation—that is still regarded as a breach of social tact, or what our quaint old ancestors would have called a sin.

Now even in my own lifetime I have seen two or three artistic revolutions, each sweeping the whole artistic world: pre-Raphaelites and Impressionists and post-Impressionists, and then any number more, and I question whether this perpetual quarrel in one of the arts is necessary. Here, however, I am not interested in my argument, but only in the real answer to it. Mr. Eric Gill really answers, in the only way in which a real revolutionist can answer, that his is the right revolution and every other is the wrong revolution. And this is admirably sensible and sane. There is no tradition in revolutions; every revolution is a revolution against the last revolution. Even in this amusing affair of the accusation of the Artists, all the Artists disagreed with each other much more than they disagreed with me. But Mr. Gill took the matter rather more seriously than the rest, and maintained in his speech, as he maintains in his book, a conception which is none the worse for being almost entirely his own. I am not professing either to prove or disprove it here, but only to notice certain rather curious changes which it indicates in the

ON ERIC GILL

history of modern thought; and especially in that vast amount of very modern thought which perpetually passes in successive waves through the minds of the thoughtless.

One queer thing about the history of thought is that very big things have a way of quietly collapsing in the middle of it, while everybody remains for generations unconscious of the collapse. Nobody knows, for instance, at what point the men of medieval times really realized that they were not, in the old sense, living in the Roman Empire. There was certainly never any definite moment when they definitely said they were not. Monks praising Simon de Montfort—that is, supporting a purely local feudal lord against a purely insular and independent king—use the old Roman word of *The Republic*, exactly as it would have been used by Licinius or Gracchus. So changes pass over modern thought, or merely over modern taste, and nobody notices the enormous implications that may perhaps follow them in the future. If I were asked what was the most extraordinary event in mere modern opinion, I should not think of Einstein or such trifles as Time and Space. I should say that the whole perspective of human history has been at least temporarily altered by the collapse of the prestige of the Renaissance. And that is due almost entirely to the Artists, those

restless demons.

The whole nineteenth-century rationalism, and most twentieth-century rationalism, is really founded on the idea that the sixteenth century broke out of the dungeon of the Dark Ages and saw the light. I am not now arguing about whether this is true. I am only pointing out that the Artists now declare it to be false. It is very difficult for the philosophers to maintain that philosophy first became rational, or for the politicians to maintain that politics first became free, or for the scientists to maintain that science first became possible, at the very moment when the Artists declare that Art first became vulgar and varnished and photographic and cheaply realistic and all the rest. After all, the Art of the Renaissance was much more conspicuously and admittedly triumphant than the philosophy of the Renaissance, or the politics of the Renaissance, or the science of the Renaissance. The public was more ready to accept Raphael as the first of painters than to accept Machiavelli as its party leader, and Bruno as its guide. It was willing, in successive stages, to admit that Botticelli was a good painter, or even that Giotto was a good painter; but almost entirely on the ground that Giotto promised to become as realistic as Botticelli, or Botticelli as realistic as Raphael.

And now that way of being realistic is rejected and

ON ERIC GILL

reviled, under the horrid title of being photographic. Men of the school of Mr. Eric Gill entirely refuse to regard Giotto as the first good artist; their highest compliment to him would be to say that he was the last good artist. They are entirely in favour of the more antiquated school of design, which ruled in even darker portions of the Dark Ages. They praise the great Byzantine patterns, for all the reasons that would have led the followers of the Renaissance to doubt whether they were even pictures. Although I took for a text the disgraceful day on which I figured as an advocate, my mood at the moment of writing is entirely judicial. I do not mean to argue either for or against the new theory of art, which discredits the rationalism and realism of the Renaissance. I only say that it does in that degree discredit the Renaissance, and that anything that discredits the Renaissance does in that degree distort the whole existing theory of European history. Only men have not realized it yet. They do not as yet see all the indirect implications that may follow upon such a theory of false progress or real reaction. Perhaps even the Artists, wicked as they are, do not know. And the Artists are such dangerous anarchists that I am not sure that I ought to tell them.

GENERAL LUDENDORFF, the eminent Prussian commander, has been reported as saying these words: "I repudiate Christianity as not appropriate to the German character." The remark set me thinking, especially about the general absence of thought, and a growing division in mankind upon that matter. To me it seems very much as if I were to say: "I deny the existence of the Solar System, as unsuited to the Chestertonian temperament." In other words, I cannot make any sense of it at all.

I do not here distinguish against the poor General because he is a German General, though Germans really have a way of overdoing these things which is rather peculiar to themselves. I do not maintain that all Prussians are pigs; but I do say that their peculiar disposition to go the whole hog makes them appear, to those opposed to them at the moment, more roundedly and completely hoggish. When Mr. Bernard Shaw declared, in his debates at the beginning of the War, that there was no difference between the Prussian and the English aristocracy, and that an officer in the Prus-

ON PRUSSIAN PAGANISM

sian Guard was neither worse nor better than an officer in the Horse Guards or the Grenadier Guards, I pointed out at the time that the plain facts were against him. That a British officer might conceivably be more of a fool than the Prussian officer; that he might be a stupider or a wickeder man; that he might even in his secret heart be a prouder man—all that is quite arguable. But that British officers do not draw their swords on waiters or spurn ladies into the gutter with their spurs is not arguable; it is certain. There is, as a hard, historical fact, a different culture and code of manners in the two countries, whatever may be the spiritual and interior truth about any individual in either.

And this distinction, as I also pointed out previously, is rather specially true in this matter of the choice or recognition of a religion. I think it not unlikely that there are venerable English warriors, respected in the club and in the camp, whose views on theology, if any, would not be expressed with the subtle wit of Pascal or the compact logic of St. Thomas Aquinas. I take it that there are many such dear old boys whose use of theological language is mostly of an exclamatory and emotional description, and is often directed rather to moving Acheron than to bending the gods. Or, again, I have no doubt a good many of them would be even avowedly sceptical and hostile to the creed of their

fathers, and would say the same sort of thing that poor Ludendorff said; only that they would express it still more vaguely by saying: "Got no use for religion, myself"; or "Never let the parsons kid me." But if anyone says that these keen sceptics or profound rationalists are just the same as General Ludendorff, that their rejection of Christianity is exactly like his rejection of Christianity, then I say that it is nothing of the sort. There is a separate type and tradition, and it is easily tested.

If you tell me that Earl Haig or Sir Henry Wilson went round England with a brass band, just after the War, advising everybody to worship Odin and Freya and Thor, because a religion of peace was inappropriate to the English character, I say they did not. If you say that the most violent materialist or the most scoffing sceptic among the dear old Majors who have quarrelled with their parsons were afterwards found erecting rude wooden altars, wreathed with oak and mistletoe, at which a true Nordic people might worship the heathen gods of their Norse piratical ancestors, I answer that they were not. Yet Ludendorff himself, a Marshal who had swayed the huge marching armies of a mighty empire and held the lives of millions of men in his hands, did actually end by doing this very thing. It is easy to call him erratic, but he cannot have been a fool;

and even a fool, if he were an ordinary English military fool, would never have turned to lunacy like that. The point to seize is that even the real resemblances that have at certain times existed between the English and the Germans, the influence of some past alliances, of some parallel religious experiences, of some old ramifications of royal families, of some very modern hypotheses about race, of some consolidation as well as competition in commerce, of some similarity of ambition in colonization—the point is that even these are resemblances relatively superficial, covering differences that are very much more subtle.

There is something positive in the Paganism of Germany which is merely negative in the Paganism of England. The red-faced old Major in the English club has a sort of frivolity even in his fury. He does not often manage to say what he means, and therefore does not really mean what he says. But General Ludendorff, when he asks a mild Saxon professor in spectacles to go down suddenly on his knees and worship Thor, does really and truly mean what he says. When Herr Hitler says other things on other subjects, which sound to us quite as extraordinary, he does really mean what he says. Like every other real difference, the difference can be turned round and regarded from either point of view; can be described in terms that belittle or terms

ON PRUSSIAN PAGANISM

that exalt. We can call that temper the presence of sincerity; we can call it only the presence of solemnity; we can call it simply the absence of sanity. But it is unquestionably the absence of a certain sort of levity; a sort of grumbling laughter that rumbles in the inside of the old Major at the club and of most other Englishmen also; and does mean, in the majority of cases, that his bark is worse than his bite. It is represented, as I have already remarked, by the somewhat familiar fact that he uses the most lurid diction of demonology for entirely trivial occasions. The Major in the club is not a diabolist or a devil-worshipper because he begins half-a-dozen sentences with: "What the devil——." But the Hitlerite is much more like a devil-worshipper, because he does really worship the German God.

Newman, I think, remarked very truly that good generally fails by falling short of itself and evil by overleaping itself. Whether or no it be a fair application, it is certainly true that the Prussian soldier may take the Swastika on his flag only too seriously; while the English soldier may take the Cross on his flag not seriously enough. The blunders or wrongs that result from both faults may often seem very much the same, and yet the faults are fundamentally opposite. Even the revolt against religion is the revolt of two different religions, or perhaps of two different irreligions. And

ON PRUSSIAN PAGANISM

yet, in spite of all this, there is one thing in which both revolts are the same, and even both rebels very similar, having been born in the same epoch out of some of the same experiences. And that is in the bottomless muddle-headedness of what they actually say.

I need not go back at this stage to what the distinguished Prussian Pagan did actually say. It is more precise and priggish in tone than the vaguer version of the same thing which would be given by our own heathen in our own happy land. But what in the world does it mean? "I repudiate Christianity as not appropriate to the German character." You are, by hypothesis, discussing whether a certain theory about the whole nature of things is true. You are discussing whether the world did begin in a certain way; go wrong in a certain way; find help to go right again in a certain way; and whether it will end in a certain way, whether we like it or not. And the answer is not that the theory is false, but that it has not been specially composed to suit the taste or temperament of people living in a particular marsh, or halfway up a particular mountain, or along the shores of a particular inland lake; or in any local atmosphere which may or may not improve the faculties for finding the truth. It does not matter whether the statement is a statement of fact; it only matters whether it will instantly fit into the mood

ON PRUSSIAN PAGANISM

now filling the mind of the people in Tibet or Tooting or Ballyhooley or Berlin. Men give that sort of reason, if you can call it a reason, for rejecting Christianity; and then they go off and complain that Christianity is so anthropocentric!

As I have here suggested, at frequent intervals and in various ways, I profoundly distrust and disbelieve in the whole of that movement which may be roughly called the Reaction after and against the Great War. As a sane man, not to make any claim to being a decent Christian, I naturally desire peace rather than war; and I am enough of an English patriot to have faced the fact, in many ways a rather unpleasant fact, that war just now might be even worse for England than for Europe. But I profoundly distrust and disbelieve in all those shades of negative revulsion, ranging from Pacifism to Pro-Germanism, which have actually passed like waves over the Press and the political sentiment of the country during the post-war period. I think England was a great deal nearer to establishing peace on the day she declared war than she is now, when any number of other nations are likely to declare war in spite of her. I think she was nearer to re-establishing a real unity of Europe when she was fighting with the Prussians than when she was merely quarrelling with the French. I believe that a real council of the Allies, if

ON THE GREAT RELAPSE

they had been guided by one clear and consistent theory of Europe, would have done better work for peace than the League of Nations. These are not views that have of late been common; perhaps they are not views that can even now be popular. But they are views in which I myself have never wavered, and in which I have of late been very strongly confirmed. Long ago, before the Balkan Wars or the Russo-Japanese War, I remember writing in this general sense: that there were two forces in the world threatening its peace, because of their history, their philosophy and their externality to the ethics of Christendom; and they were Prussia and Japan. I remember horrifying all my Liberal friends, when I wrote for the *Daily News* in the days of my youth, by saying this about Japan. I did not, however, modify my view then. I am certainly not likely to modify it now.

But my subject here is the nature of that post-war Reaction. Nobody, I think, has tried to analyse that mood, in which a cold fit of war-weariness followed so very rapidly on a very hot fit of war. Psychologists have been let loose everywhere on every subject; we have heard all about the psychology of war and the psychology of war-propaganda. We have not heard much about the psychology of anti-war propaganda, or why the very same men who were first fanatical for the one should

ON THE GREAT RELAPSE

afterwards be equally fanatical for the other. Now, to begin with, I deeply distrust the mood because it was a mood. It is not only true that it was merely emotional; it is almost true that it was merely physical. People were sick of war in the real sense that it made them sick. It was very natural, and, up to a point, even very healthy, as being physically sick can be an indication of health or an improvement of health. But sickness is not an opinion; far less a conviction. Disgust is more violent than disapproval, but it is much less strong than disapproval. And nothing is more essentially unstable than the sort of disgust that merely follows upon excess. In short, the peace mood just after the war was the well-known mood of the Morning After the Night Before. It was the headache of the drunkard whose excesses in drink have gone to his head. As the mere blind bibulous wine-drinker may be weary of wine, so the mere journalistic Jingo was weary of war. Certainly, the reaction was healthy in so far as some of the fevers and ravings of the war period had been unhealthy. Certainly, at least, the reaction was human, because the strain of war is in its nature inhuman. But there is nothing fixed or final or responsible or enduring about a feeling of that kind; even if it is human, even if it is healthy. In a week the drunkard will have lost his headache, and may very probably continue his sci-
-226-

ON THE GREAT RELAPSE

tific experiments, directed to test the strength of his head. The mere nausea which comes through having seen the same thing for five years will weaken in people who have not seen it for twelve years. A new generation, which has not experienced the horrors of war, will rise brandishing sabres and bayonets; as in Prussia. A remote country, which was not drawn deeply into the war, will soon be ready for a new war of its own; as in Japan.

Peace must not be useful merely as an emetic, but as an ethical diet rather than a medicine. It must be founded on some theory of things; on some conception of history and humanity; on some philosophy of the nature of the nations and the true international ideal. Now there was another and deeper defect in the anti-war reaction in England. It was not a new light on things, or a new theory of things, or a closer comprehension of other countries and the rest of civilization. On the contrary, it was a *relapse* into all our own old theories about other countries, including our old contempt for other countries. The more Pacifist England was actually a more insular England. For six years we abused our enemies; for six more years we abused our allies. And now our popular patriotic Press seems to have settled down into abusing them both, while refusing to accept any responsibility for the result. We have

ON THE GREAT RELAPSE

relapsed into the most insular and insolent and ignorant phase of our past history: the phase in which all Frenchmen were frogs and all Germans were sausages. In patriotic cartoons today you will see all the foreigners dressed up as figures of fun which are no longer even funny, except in the sense that educated people had learnt to laugh at such ignorance even in Victorian times. The Frenchman with waxed moustaches and shrugged shoulders; the German with walrus moustache and enormous pipe; the Russian with fur cap and bushy beard—these grotesque fossils of prehistoric prejudice would have been much too crude for the time of Tennyson and Prince Albert. Cultivated men of that Victorian epoch would have classed them with the old legend that the Pope wanted to introduce wooden shoes; or that Boney was a real ogre out of a fairy-tale. Yet the final result of our negative or neutral attitude, to friends and foes, has been a mere sinking back into these old stupidities, which the world had actually outgrown on the day when England and France and Flanders took the field against Prussia. We were more truly international in that international war than we are now in this swaggering, self-flattering, vulgarly Jingo peace.

Finally, in that long stretch of years since the war,

ON THE GREAT RELAPSE

which have been full of urgent and feverish talk about the necessity of keeping the peace, nobody has really tried to prevent war at all. Nobody has done the one really difficult and indispensable thing; the only thing that might possibly avert a war in the earlier stages of a quarrel. Nobody has tried to look at the side opposite to his own side. Whenever our Pacifist writers were blaming anything or anybody, they never paused for one moment to ask whether there was any defence for what they attacked. When people thought France was wrong in the quarrel, they wrote exactly as they did when they thought Germany was wrong in the war. They were not trying to compose the quarrel; they were only trying to prove that they were right in the quarrel. If they really wanted to avert war in Europe, they should have started from the very beginning with full statements of the case for each of the quarrelling States of Europe. They should have been careful especially to state the case for those whom they liked least. We know they have done nothing of the sort. Mr. H. G. Wells has written a thousand pages in favour of Peace, but not one page in favour of Poland. Lord Russell has said much, from his point of view, to deter men from fighting, but nothing that would deter Mussolini from fighting; and nothing certainly that could deter any

ON THE GREAT RELAPSE

Communist from fighting Mussolini. To examine, prove, disprove, or reconcile the philosophies of Europe —that would be a task for a philosopher, but not for a philosopher like Bertrand Russell. That is the only way to Peace; and few be they that find it.

EVERYONE will be pleased to see that Mr. H. G. Wells has again resumed his provocative character of prophet, and recently started in a well-known Sunday paper what is described as a History of the Next Hundred Years. It may be suggested that it is rather unfair that such a work should be criticized when it has only just started. Yet I do not admit the objection; for this very vital reason—that the only thing I really object to about the prophecy is the place where it starts.

It does not start from where you and I have to start, poor devils; from the actual crisis and condition in which we find ourselves. It starts from a perfect social condition, that is supposed to exist some indefinite number of centuries hence. Mr. Wells takes his fixed point in the future; and from that finds it easy to show that all our modern politics and economics are unfixed—which, God knows, is very true. But there is always something a little irritating about a man writing as a Utopian; not in the sense of one who desires Utopia, but in the sense of one who already inhabits Utopia. He represents himself as a man living in a society of

ON THE NEXT HUNDRED YEARS

perfect ease and equality and equity; and gazing with cold compassion and unsympathetic sympathy upon us who are struggling in a tangle of cross-purposes, which is often quite as much a complexity of virtues as a complexity of vices. Anyhow, I think this trick of *starting* from an imaginary and ideal state in the future is a little unfair. Mr. Wells would think it unfair, if I wrote a book in the capacity of an Angel, or from the standpoint of a saint beatified in heaven; and then pointed out how paltry all our little scientific experiments, our pottering about with political and social reforms, our arguing about philosophical and literary problems, appeared to a higher intelligence upon the plane of Paradise. It seems to me quite as unfair when it is only an Earthly Paradise. For instance, Mr. Wells very rightly condemns the dirty intrigues of modern finance, and the secret omnipotence of modern financiers. I do not complain of his saying, as I should say myself, that a more healthy and vigilant society would make such conspiracies much more difficult. But his Happy Man of the Future simply says that they would be impossible, because an office called the Bureau of Transactions would have made them impossible.

Now this affects me very much as if he were to say that in the perfect State he and I could not even differ,

ON THE NEXT HUNDRED YEARS

because everything would have been resolved by the Bureau of Agreements. It is quite an arguable logical fancy, such as might have figured among the thousand happy fancies of his early work, that knowledge might be so finally mastered and spread out that it would be impossible for Mr. Wells and myself to argue about anything, any more than we argue now about the trains in Bradshaw, or the plan of the maze at Hampton Court. Everybody would know everything, and there would be no such thing as a matter of opinion. It would be quite as certain, say, that supernatural religion had been a good or a bad thing for men, as that a certain amount of poison will kill a man or that a certain particular antidote will save him. There will be an enormous Encyclopaedia of Everything, in which every question once disputed will be definitely settled; and it will contain no mistakes, except possibly misprints, like the big Telephone Directory. I can imagine Mr. H. G. Wells, especially in his youth, writing quite a fascinating fairy-tale of science along exactly those lines. But I should not believe in his fairy-tale about the Bureau of Agreements; nor do I believe in his fairy-tale about the Bureau of Transactions. I heartily believe that the secret and sordid transactions now allowed in finance and commerce could be brought much more

ON THE NEXT HUNDRED YEARS

under public and responsible inspection than they are. So, for that matter, I am quite willing to believe that there might be a much larger agreement about the facts of history and science, which would save us from a number of benighted quarrels founded on popular science and cheap patriotic history. It would be quite as much advantage to my side of the quarrel as to his. It would be a great relief for us to know that there really was a universally accepted book of reference, which would for ever forbid men to believe that Galileo was tortured and burned, or that the Immaculate Conception is the same as the Incarnation. It would save us a lot of trouble in explaining things. But I do not believe that the Encyclopaedia of Everything would really and completely settle every dispute; and I do not believe that the Bureau of Transactions would finally and for ever prevent the possibility of scandalous transactions. And I do not believe it, because I do believe my eyes; because I do believe such actual experience as I have had in fifty years of meeting my fellow-creatures, and gradually forming an opinion about all these jolly fellows, and what is the matter with them.

In short, the simple answer to the Superior Person, who looks down scornfully on our scandals and our sins from the Utopia of a few centuries hence, can be stated in the plainest possible words: "What happens

ON THE NEXT HUNDRED YEARS

when the Bureau of Transactions also becomes corrupt?" What happens when the Bureau of Transactions begins to have its own secret transactions? It may be against the whole plan and purpose and ideal of the institution to admit any such slackness or secrecy. So it is against the very name and title of a Court of Justice to be unjust. So it is against the very name and title of the distribution of Honours to fail upon the point of honour. So it is a violation of democracy for demagogues to deceive the people; or a violation of the very nature of a newspaper that its proprietor should suppress the news. But, somehow, we have all heard of these things being done. What we want to know is *how* the Angels who work in the Bureau of Transactions in the Utopia to be established centuries hence are guaranteed to be good at every minute of their mortal and troubled lives, and never to fall one inch for one instant below the highest and hardest and most heroic standard of human watchfulness and self-control. As I have already explained, I am in no sense arguing that the Bureau of Transactions will not be a reform, or a much-needed reform, or a reform that may really deal with scandals like that of Kreuger. I am not saying it will not be a reform; I am only objecting to the placid implication that it will never need to be reformed.

ON THE NEXT HUNDRED YEARS

In other words, the implication, or ideal, that was once expressed in the title of *Men Like Gods* does really lie behind even the most reasonable demands for the improvement of men as men. Mr. Wells's imaginary author, writing at an unknown date in an undiscovered country, does really talk as if the very idea of such base revolts or betrayals of the social order was to him unthinkable. What I deny is that there will ever be a social order in which they are unthinkable. There might be a very vigorous social order, in which for some time they were very nearly impracticable. But in the long run, I fancy, the healthiest social order would come back to being pretty thankful if it could say they were rare. And I do not believe that this result could be achieved, or even approached, by anything like a mere improvement in social machinery, or the establishment of Bureaus for Everything. I think it happens only when there is a strong sense of duty and dignity implanted in people, not by any government or even any school, but by something which they recognize as making a secret call upon a solitary soul. I do not believe in Men Like Gods; but I do believe in Men With Gods; or, preferably (such is my fastidious taste in such matters), a God. That is another and much bigger question, though it involves no more credulity than

ON THE NEXT HUNDRED YEARS

a complete belief in Utopia. My only point, here, is that it is at least as arbitrary for the great novelist to write his letters *from* Utopia, as it would be for me to date my criticism from Paradise.

UNIVERSAL
LIBRARY



126 156

UNIVERSAL
LIBRARY